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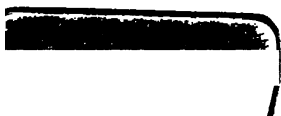
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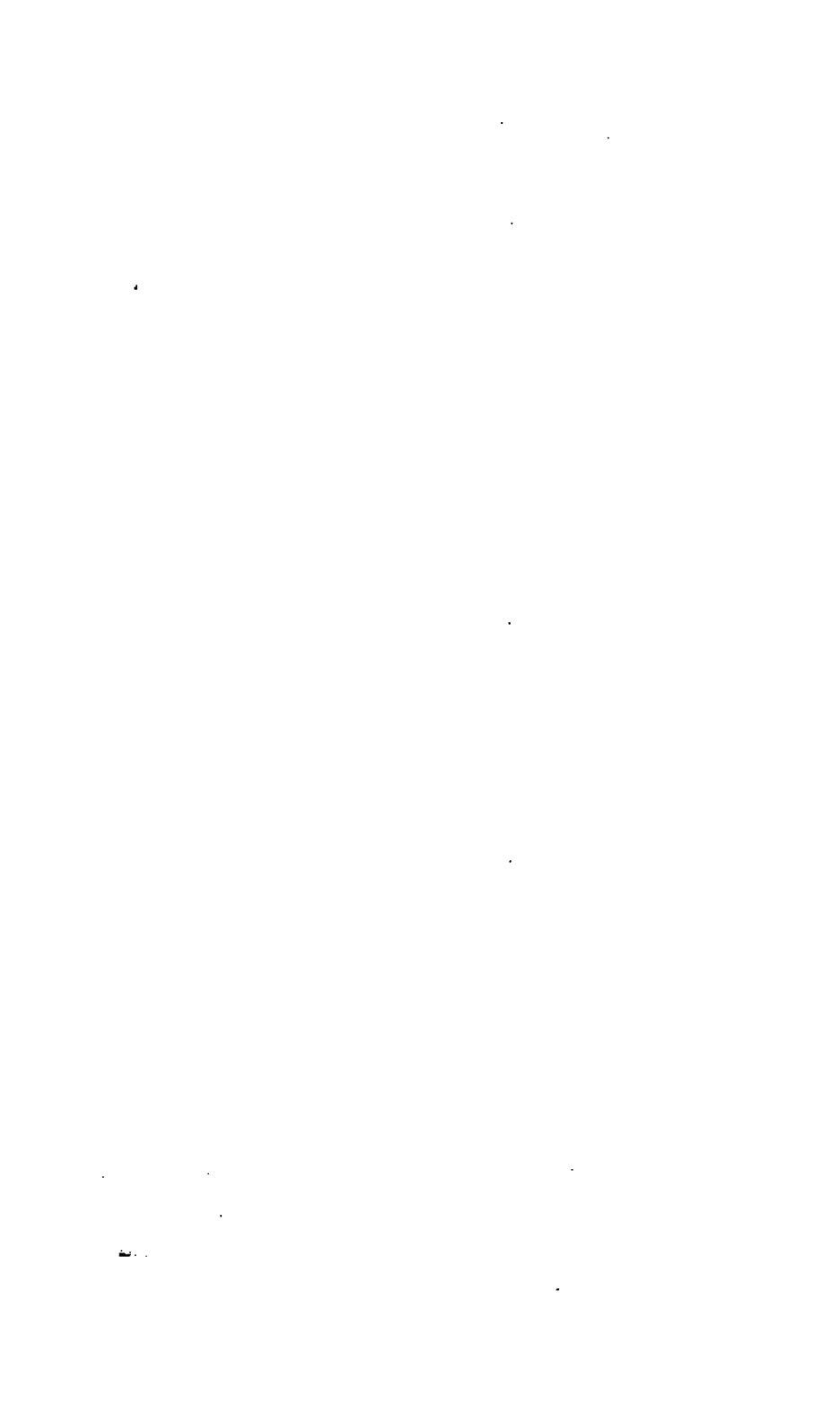
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**H O N O U R !**



# H O N O U R !

A TALE.

*g. Peck*

"EUSTACE.—Is thy tale true?"

"CLARE.—Alas! too true!"



IN ONE VOLUME.

LONDON

SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.

1844.



# H O N O U R.

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## CHAPTER I.

“ THERE !” said Botherem Banks, starting up in an ecstasy, “ if ever man was born a poet, *I* am that man ! Let me see, I must read them once again, to make sure there are no mistakes ;” and snatching up the paper from off the table at which he had been writing his splendid composition, placed himself before a dressing-glass, and assuming what he called his “ Inspired attitude,” commenced reading aloud the following superb effusion, in a tone and with a look that might have moved the gravest to mirth, the most insensible to pity :—

“ Hear me, Bertha, hear me sigh ;  
Listen, fairest, lest I die.  
Grant, ah ! grant one pitying tear,  
Or soon thou’lt shed it o’er my bier.

Hearken, sweet one, deign, I pray,  
To cast thy bright eye on my lay ;  
Listen while I tell my pain,  
Nor let me, dearest, plead in vain.



Think of all the torture—grief—  
 What I suffer—no relief;  
 This heart will burst—alas! too true—  
 No one can soothe my woes but you!

Then once again let me implore,  
 (Love knows how oft I've done't before,)   
 That thou wouldst deign to smile on me,—  
 My soul is center'd—wrapt in thee!

Dear cruel fair! and canst thou be  
 Blind to the dreadful change in me?  
 All joy is fled, all peace is gone,  
 Woe, woe! alas! why was I born!

I neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep;  
 All I can do, dear maid, 's to weep  
 O'er my lost peace; my sorrow's such!  
 Thou canst not guess—ah, no! how much

Of mis'ry has my present doom—  
 I rack to think what's yet to come—  
 Destruction—death—an early grave;  
 But fairest, dearest, thou canst save

My trusting heart from all this woe,  
 Smile on me; and what here below—  
 What can earth give, what bliss of bliss,  
 Can match, sweet girl, such joy as this?

Then hear me, hear me while I pray,  
 (Turn not thy lovely face away;)   
 Hear me on my oath declare,  
 Bertha, beauteous, dearest, fair—

That while I live no power shall make  
 Me love another; take, oh! take  
 Compassion on my tortured brain,—  
 Bid, oh! bid me hope again!

Bid hope, and joy, and life, return—  
 Ay, one, or all; for, Bertha, learn—  
 If hope return not, life is fled—  
 Say *nay*, and Botherem is dead!"

"There now! if that is not *poetry*, and *good* poetry too, I know not what is," cried the delighted composer. "I find no single word I can object to, unless, indeed, it be my own confounded inharmonious *nom de batême*, for Christian, I can't, and wont call it.

"Would to heaven the fool who stood godfather for me had been an hundred fathom under water, before he thought of bestowing such an hideously sounding appellative on one who was destined to become an ornament to the age in which he lived.

"It has been the bane of my existence; it sits like an incubus on my bright aspiring hopes; it annoys, it grieves, it haunts, it torments, it shames, it disgusts me! Try as I will, I can never finish, or at least render perfect, either ode, sonnet, address, epic, love-song or dirge, without introducing it, and turn which way I may, there, like some hateful phantom, some sight-offending spectre, it glares upon me. As the demon work of his own head to the soul-stricken Frankenstein, is that abominable name they so cruelly forced upon me in my infant days; 'tis a ceaseless source of repining, an endless agony, a reproach to those who gave it!

"Alas! alas! how monstrously unfeeling. Could they have but guessed the misery 'twould have caused, they never, never, surely, had been so barbarous!

"Oh! that they had called me after some mighty hero; some great inspired poet; some wondrous painter; some far-famed master of the lute and lyre; then, ah! then, had I been blessed, thrice blessed; but now, oh! shades of Dante, Tasso, Shakspeare, Milton, hear, and pity thy brother bard!

"Why, even common names, in common use,

would offend me less than my own detested, unmusical, inglorious one. Yes, some there be, that come right trippingly off the tongue, and sound full sweetly in a lady's ear.

"Let me think on those that are the most euphonious; let me pronounce them with a poet's dulcet tones, and draw the sad comparison!

"Edgar, Bertram, Herbert, Adolphus, Rodolph, Frederick, Augustus! Ah! the brother of my adored Bertha is so called; 'tis a splendid distinguishingment, and right nobly does he bear it.

"How truly poetical would this sound:—

"Say *nay*, Augustus then is dead!

"Ah! how far, far more sublime and pathetic than—

"Say *nay*, and Botherem is dead!

"Of a truth I could weep; shed floods of bitter, bitter scalding tears, but to contemplate the gulf-like difference!

"Well, well," resumed he after a pause, in which something bearing a strong resemblance to a pearly drop, or, as he would more elegantly have expressed it, "the liquid sorrow trembling in his orb," had made its appearance, which said liquid sorrow he hastily brushed away with a white cambric pocket-handkerchief, bearing the initials B. E. M. marked in silver, at one of the very beautifully embroidered corners. How our poet became possessed of this truly elegant appendage to a lady's toilet is extremely difficult to say; it had been a matter of complaint and wonder with the laundry-maid at Darcey Hall, upon one occasion that, whereas, she had for certain hung out *eight* of her young mistress's lovely handkerchiefs to dry, when

she went to the line, only *seven* could be found ; a terrible rout did the rosy-cheeked damsel make about her loss, but all to no purpose ; gone it was, beyond any doubt, though how, or where, poor Susan, with much grief, declared “ she couldn’t even guess.”

Far be it from us to insinuate ; but certainly it was strange, passing strange, that a handkerchief should be suddenly missed, one answering its exact description found in a gentleman’s possession, at the same time that gentleman being about the last, the very last of his race, upon whom its former owner would for a moment have thought of bestowing it—but so it was ; he had it ; and though secreted with all a jealous lover’s care from eyes profane, it was never absent from its adoring master ; no, not for the tithe part of a second ; he washed it when soiled, dried it in his bosom, slept with it under his pillow, and laid it at full stretch over the back of a chair, placing the said chair in immediate proximity with himself, every morning while dressing, to make assurance doubly sure that his blessed treasure was safe.

“ Well, well,” continued Botherem, replacing the handkerchief in its sacred resting-place, as a bright thought, that lent a kind of hideous intelligence to his extraordinarily tinted face and unusual coloured eyes, darted athwart his teeming, restless brain, “ Well, well, it matters not. Ah ! most glorious pattern of aspiring genius, beloved Shakspeare ! right truly hast thou said, and full opportunely do I now recall those spirit-soothing words, uttered by thee in some happy moment of wondrous inspiration ; happy for thee, thou great magician, and thrice happy for me thy humble worshipper !

“ Away with care and sorrow ; from henceforth

shalt thou add glory rather than shame to thy resigned possessor. For me, and such as me, wrote the mighty bard those heart-enlivening words, 'What's in a name?' No, surely no, there's nothing in a name. We, the sons of poetry and song, give lustre to the name; the name, be what it may, dulls not our brightness!

"I will rest me content, and be no more dismayed. Aha, aha!" laughed he, "that thought has made me gayest of the gay; from henceforth proud shall I be instead of grieved thereat. Who ever heard of *Mr. Shakespear*, or *Mr. Milton*? No; is it not William Shakespear? John Milton? and shall it not be Botherem Banks? Ay, children in unborn generations will be called after me, and England shall proudly boast the name that I now bear.

"When I but reflect upon the egregious blunder committed by my poor departed father,—when I look at myself and say, this creature of love, sentiment, and sensibility, was for a season consigned to the hideous, revolting, heart-sickening, debasing, harrowing, hatefully loathsome trade, or, as it is called, profession of medicine. Oh! the thing is terrible to remember, and I oftentimes ask myself, could such barbarity really have been meant, or was it but to try me?

"What! compel a child of genius, a son of song, to learn the hideous art of pulse-feeling, bone-setting, bandage-binding, teeth-drawing, pill-making, physic-mixing! Out upon it! Alas! I pity them for their want of discernment, for, unless acting under some incomprehensible delusion, I cannot even guess how those who advised my deceased progenitor to the hardly-to-be-credited step, could have been guilty of so great, so unpardonable an

offence ; an act of injustice committed not only against my ill-used self, but against the world at large ; however, I forgive them,—ay, from the inmost recesses of my love-elated, muse-inspired heart I forgive them, though I cannot divest myself of a painfully soul-distressing sensation, as often as I glance back with my mind's eye at that—oh ! that den of horrors, that fearful shamle, that insult to sense, that abomination to humanity, called by the presiding demon, ' his dissecting-room !'

"Perdition seize the unfeeling old Death-warrant, to think a soul, refined and purified like mine, could stand and listen unmoved for hours to loathed disgusting talk about—Faugh ! Away, away with such detested reminiscences ; my flesh creeps, and an icy chillness seizes my frame, as the thoughts of those terrors pass, like unholy deeds committed, in startling array before my tortured memory !

"Surely, surely, if that hated monster ne'er spake true before, he did so when, in a fit of brute-like passion, he exclaimed, ' Sir, you are not fitted for the profession ; you will never make a doctor, and the sooner you leave my house the better.'

"Not fitted for the profession ! never make a doctor ! Heaven forbid ! I shrink in horror at the very name, but again I repeat my thorough, entire, unmitigated forgiveness ; they erred in error, not in sin. Sweet Bertha, empress of this heart, loveliest of womankind !—my soul's best idol !—a *poet*, though poor and humble, may dare to woo thee, and, wooing, hope to win ; but a *doctor* ! oh, monstrous, monstrous ! think of such a hideous creature dreaming upon love ! Had they persisted in training me up in their revolting craft, thou, fair-

est of thy sex, had been lost to me for ever; surely some kind, pitying, benignant spirit hovered over me, and with sweet intercession saved me from such utter, utter ruin!

“Cupid and Æsculapius! aha, aha! when the antipodes meet, then, and not till then, may we expect to see love and physic go hand in hand; if wealth must be gained by such a trade, oh! keep me, ye gods, as hermit poor. Genius needs not riches, a poet's poverty is his highest crown of glory. Gold, gold, I love thee not, I need thee not; nay, I condemn, despise thee; thou art terrene, the riches of the muse-inspired are costlier far than gold,—no—

“‘I care not for station, for power, or wealth,  
Give me sweet content, with a *little* of pelf,  
A plenty of leisure, a wife, and a pen,  
Then surely I rank with the happiest men.’

“How strange! and yet it is not strange either, because I know and feel myself to have been under the especial care of divine Erato, that fairest sister of the fairest nine, from my birth up until now; indeed, what can prove it more than the ease with which I fit my thoughts to soft, melodious, flowing numbers? but what is wondrous, ay, even to myself, and throws me into ecstasies of delight whene'er I dwell thereon, is the tenfold force of harmony, the soul-melting pathos, the deep sublimity of thought that pours itself unbidden, like rich silver streams, from my ever ready pen. Sweet, beauteous, adored Bertha, to thee I owe whatever praise the world hereafter shall accord to lines thy loveliness alone hath mellowed, softened, dignified, adorned.

“Once more,—yes, once more—let me retrace the page on which thy beloved name, angelic daughter

of our fallen race, stands out, like some bright beacon, luring thy lover on to honour and renown."

While our friend Botherem is writing it fair "yet once again," we shall take the liberty to offer a slight personal sketch of sweet Bertha's devoted adorer to the attention of our readers.

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## CHAPTER II.

MRS. BANKS had in her time rendered good service unto the state; that is, if increasing its population may be called *good*, for in the inconceivably short space of fourteen years, this worthy matron had presented no less than *twelve* fine, smiling, promising babies to her proud and happy lord. Of this twelve, three were boys, and nine were girls; but it pleased Providence in its wisdom, to remove four of this charming progeny in the first days of their youth and innocence; so at the time our tale begins, *but* eight remained, five fair daughters, and three valiant sons; or, to describe them as they really were, five good-natured, kind-hearted, *rather* well-looking girls, who, had it not been for the unexpected and unwelcome return home of one of their number, Esther, the eldest sister, who had been brought up from infancy by a distant relative, they would have jogged on, well pleased with themselves and all around them; but as Esther claims a greater share of our attention than the others, we shall speak more at large about her hereafter. Some of these fair maidens had real *bona-fide* sweethearts,



others *thought* they had them, and that answered the same purpose, at least it served to keep them in good humour, and well pleased with themselves ; a state of beatitude rarely interrupted excepting when “ that disagreeable Esther ” was either present, or the subject of conversation ; then, indeed, all the worst points in their characters shone out, and, pity it was ! However, they shall speak for themselves ; then we can nothing extenuate, or set down aught in malice.

Of the three sons, one, the eldest, was settled, and thriving as a rich merchant at Bristol ; the youngest, a lad about sixteen, still remained at school ; and our friend Botherem, as has doubtless been discovered, flourished as a finished gentleman, and a first-rate poet.

As it is usual in very large families, where the means, if not small, can scarcely be called ample, to make the sons do “ something,” poor Botherem, after having been at, and taken from, a dozen schools, more or less, and invariably bringing away from each the honourable and very flattering distinction of being beyond parallel the greatest dunce within its walls, was, after many anxious misgivings, and much painful discussion on the part of his parents, sent to study the healing art, under a very clever and eminent man, who, at the end of two years, having done all that mortal could do, to beat something like the rudiments of a profession, which any other young man would have more than half acquired in the same space, into the thick skull of his hopeful pupil, returned him with two-thirds of the money given for his apprenticeship, upon his poor father’s hands, with these words,—“ Sir, I am sorry to tell you, your son is not fitted for our profession.”

"I always feared so, sir," replied Mr. Banks; "nor any other that I know of."

"If you will take my advice, sir, though I am fully aware counsel unasked is seldom thankfully received; but if you will be guided by me, you will let your son remain as he is—without any profession at all."

"But, my dear doctor, a young man of his age without occupation, is sure to get into mischief."

"Have no fears on that head, my good sir; keep him at home, do not allow him too much ready money, and my word for it, he will give you no further anxiety. A little vexation, occasioned by some sentimental outburst of love and poetry," continued the doctor, laughing, "may at times trouble and annoy you; but beyond this there is little to fear."

"But, by having his time wholly unemployed, the chance is he seeks for other amusement than his home affords, and in so doing may fall into bad hands."

"That rests with *you*, my dear sir. Your son is not a young man to be sought for *himself*; the low and vicious take no pleasure in the company of those above them, unless they can make themselves agreeable as boon companions, or useful as money-lenders. Now, the first of these qualifications your son Botherem is wholly deficient in; he could no more drink deeply, smoke much, or sing a comic song, than I could; and for the last, you have only to break him 'short,' as the saying is, and, depend upon my knowledge of his character for predicting you will have little or no trouble with him, beyond what I have already mentioned."

Accordingly, Botherem Banks was allowed to remain at home, until something could be thought

about ; for his father would not be prevailed upon to consent to his living a life of idleness, though fully aware there were few, very few things, for which he was fit. However, it so chanced, that while the worthy man hoped, feared, thought, and debated within his own mind what was best to be done, it pleased Heaven to take him from all his troubles and anxieties, to a better world ; and when Mrs. Banks, who was a shrewd, clear-headed woman, recovered the shock occasioned by the loss of her husband, set herself seriously to debate the matter, she wisely came to the determination of letting things remain as they were ; for, as she justly observed, “ It would be both useless and cruel, to make what few brains nature had bestowed upon poor Botherem more confused than they were, by insisting upon his studying a profession, which at the end of ten years he would know as much about as he did at the beginning. No, no ; there will be enough to keep them all, when I am dead, if not in affluence, at least comfortably, and Botherem never was extravagant. It is bad enough, in all conscience, to make a boy with his head full of good brains, study from morning till night ; but the idea of compelling such a one as our poor Botherem (who was never over bright, not even before he took to scribbling poetry,) to pore over Latin, Greek, and such stuff, from one year’s end to another, would be quite barbarous, absolutely downright unfeeling. It shall never be done with *my* consent !

“ If we only let him alone, he will do vastly well ; he is good-natured and affectionate ; and, surely, while I am content to keep him, no one need trouble themselves about the matter. I know he is incapable of earning his own bread,” pursued

the poor mother, with a sigh, "and I will never compel him to attempt it."

So, having come to this wise and kind conclusion, nothing more was said upon the subject; and our friend Botherem had lived at home in happy indolence, making love and writing poetry, from the age of seventeen up to the period at which he is first introduced to our readers, a space of time not exceeding twelve years, but certainly embracing more than two-thirds.

Botherem Banks was one of those extraordinary creatures who, though they *do* exist, are rarely to be met with. It would have been wholly impossible to sit in the company of Botherem for ten minutes, without asking oneself for what purpose such an animal could be sent into this world.

Now, fair ladies, (unto you I appeal—women are far more keenly alive to what is ridiculous in the other sex, than they are themselves) no, I will not say *ladies*—I only ask the question of that gentle maiden, whose individual bright eyes may be skimming these pages at this moment, has it ever been your hapless fate to be wooed by such an intellectual being as the poet Botherem? If it has, I pity you, from my heart of hearts; for great must have been the struggle between mirth and mortification. If you were once, though for ever so short a space, the "Soul's idol" of such an one, you can understand what must be the feelings of the lovely Bertha Murray, while listening to rhapsodies poured forth in tones neither low, soft, nor sweet, but vastly resembling the north wind whistling through a key-hole—whizzing, sharp, and exceedingly painful to the ear! If you have not,

if it has been your happier lot to listen but to love—to smile approval, not disdain—to patiently wait for, instead of precipitately retreating from the one who wooed, and wooing wished to win, nor wooed and wished in vain—if he who sought you was as man should be, good, wise, noble, brave and generous, well-looking, well-thinking, well speaking, and—well-loved, *you* scarce can picture what poor Botherem was. Fancy, then—not a fancy sketch, but a real, living, breathing, eating, drinking, sleeping, talking, walking, thinking, though far from *reasoning* being, some five feet two or less, with a head of hair that, were you engaged in the mysteries of silk sorting, and wished to match the colour, would be immensely puzzled as to what particular shade it belonged, doubting whether orange, red, or yellow, claimed closest affinity unto the crowning glory of that queer-shaped brow; and not until after much consultation, and very mature deliberation, would you at last pronounce that salmon, and none other, was its name.

Well now, imagine a little man, *not* measuring five feet two, with salmon-coloured hair, goggling eyes, that looked as if they were gazing in bewildered astonishment upon some hideous spectre, fearful to behold, rather than attempting to look love on a lady fair. His lean and sallow puckered cheeks drawn tightly in, his enormous mouth gaping wide—but no, as Botherem Banks was decidedly a distinct, if not a distinguished being from his fellow-men, it would scarce be justice to draw him other than at full length, which said full length—were it taken from the top of his head to the tip of his toe, including brains and all—might well be called a *miniature*; for Botherem was, in every sense of the word, *little*—little in height, little in width,

little in understanding, little in everything but self-conceit. It was not his want of inches alone that made him thus diminutive; there are many sons of Adam who can boast no greater share of altitude than Botherem Banks, to whom the word *little* could in no way apply. The want of height does not make a man insignificant, any more than the possession thereof can add to his importance, unless the mental and the physical bear due proportion as to strength and size. Now, had friend Botherem grown to six feet and upwards, he would not, he never could have been called a *great* man. No, he was little in all things but three,—vanity, eyes, and feet; and of a truth these were anything but small:

The eyes—oh, such eyes! eyes of which the owner was proud,—ay, very, very proud; and say, fair maiden, could *he* well be otherwise, for they were great, staring, stupid, heavy, goggling, rolling, green, saucer-shaped things, which, according to his own opinion, were the only formed and coloured orbs out of which sentiment, love, and poetry could beam. He had heard, read, been told, or *fancied* he had so heard, read, or been told, that a snub nose indicated strength of mind and decision of character, and well was it for his *amour propre* that he could so readily adopt, and pass off for his own, this rather singular opinion regarding the fair proportions of his nasal organ, for surely never was nose so snubbed before, or, as he more elegantly expressed it, so intellectually formed. His mouth, which was very large, and always wide open, displayed what might by some have been called a good set of teeth, if they had not unfortunately gloried in more longitude than latitude, thereby giving the beholder an unpleasant notion connected

with sharks, and such rapacious gentry ; his ear might very well have served the purpose of a cheese-plate in time of need, had it not, like the *dents*, boasted a far greater share of length than width.

The beauty and regularity of these splendid features, were considerably enhanced by what our bard invariably termed his interestingly and pensively poetical complexion, pale, melancholy, and subdued, but what a less partial person would have pronounced immensely like an elderly parsnip covered with melted butter—sallow and nasty looking. The only tolerable thing belonging to him, or rather that which was less hideous than all other portions of his graceful form, and consequently loved with absorbing adoration, was his hand ; for though thick, short, fat, and puffy, it might be called white, and fully did he know it. Oh ! the hours he spent in caressing that plump, round hand ; and then the rings,—dear heart, those rings !—two on every finger, and when he went a wooing, one upon each thumb. These larger ornaments he had more than once attempted to introduce at home when company was there, but as his sisters sapiently observed, “that being rather too much of a good thing,” he was compelled to be content with the smaller number of sixteen upon ordinary occasions, or when the “girls” were by, reserving the amethyst and ruby for more happy times—such days he went love-making all alone.

It is difficult to say which claimed the greatest share of Botherem’s regard, his hands or eyes, each so exactly in accordance with his own ideas of perfect beauty ; but if he loved his hands, he hated—ay, absolutely *hated*—his feet ; for with all his superabundance of self-conceit, he could not be blind to this one terrible defect, they were unredeemably

hideous ; and so great was his abhorrence of them, that more than once the thought occurred of having them cut off, and a small, beautifully-shaped, cork pair put in their place—" But then that would be a most painful operation doubtless," debated Botherem in his own mind, " and I never was one to bear physical suffering with much fortitude ; my frame is far too delicately formed to bear up boldly against vulgar pain ; the nerves of poets are unlike other men's, keenly, sensitively alive to that which creatures made in coarser moulds feel not, nor care about."

So there was nothing left for it but to cram them into the smallest-sized boots which, by dint of pushing and striving, he could possibly coax those members into, and the consequence was, that, by these repeated endeavours to bring the enemy to subjection, the violent measures adopted to enforce obedience roused a spirit of resistance, and at last, so great was the struggle, and so determined the opposition, that whereas, on the outbreak of this warfare, there were but two feet and ten toes to contend with, before the campaign closed, those two feet had assumed the formidable bulk of at least four, and the ten toes, by auxiliary aid of corns, bunions, inverted nails, and numerous other allies, all rearing their banners in unflinching hostility against the ruthless invader of their peace and ease, so completely convinced their would-be conqueror how utterly useless must all further attacks upon that rebellious portion of his once abject dominion prove, that he gave up the enterprise in despair, and left them for the future in uninterrupted quiet, only placing such restrictions upon them as might be deemed advantageous to their own comfort, in the form of large, very large outworks, composed



of exceedingly pliable materials, barriers, as he sighingly observed, sufficiently efficacious to prevent the enemy from without molesting their calm content, but out of which they themselves could walk at will, or, to speak matter of fact, poor Botherem was at last compelled to give up the torturing practice he had so long writhed under, of wearing boots certainly two sizes, if not three, smaller than his enormous *piez*, and allow the cordwainer to manufacture articles such as he himself could, without any very extraordinary exertion, induce his customer's ungainly ankles to descend into, without causing that customer's eyes to run over with tears, forced out by the agonizing torment of the intensely excruciating operation.

Many, very many, were the bitterly rueful looks cast by our poet upon those unsightly terminations, and it would be less than truth to deny, that more than once, in the course of the first day's wear, poor Botherem caught himself unconsciously dealing blows upon those awful drawbacks to his perfect self-love and complacency, as though inflicting summary vengeance and richly deserved punishment on some hated and deadly foe. He sat for several hours after donning those indispensable, but abominable incasements, in a kind of torpor, divided between grief and resentment. Which was deserving his deepest abhorrence, Dame Nature or Crispin's son, he could not very well determine; so, having ruminated until he was quite weary and ravenously hungry, (Bothorem Banks was always hungry,) he hastily commenced his toilet preparatory for dinner, ejaculating several times over, with a face of such dolour that it might have moved the most unfeeling to sympathy—"I have really done all I can; who could do more?"

There was one remarkable peculiarity about our friend Botherem, touching his dress, which none could fathom, and which he would not explain; it certainly was singular, very singular, that intense affection for the fair *nankeen*—decidedly nine months out of twelve, the attachments in which he delighted to enclose his nether man were composed of that costly and most becoming fabric.

To make the peculiar beauty of this graceful style of dress fully understood by the ignorant, while forming part of our poet's costume, it must be stated, that not only did Botherem Banks devotedly love the produce of China's looms, but so great was his reverence for their valuable manufacture, and so decidedly averse did he ever seem to the slightest appearance of extravagance regarding the cutting out and making up of those indispensable parts of his wardrobe, that he invariably gave his tailor strict injunctions not to waste the stuff, at least such was the natural inference drawn by those who, week after week, month after month, and year after year, beheld those necessary articles of dress worn by Botherem Banks, shorn of their fair proportions, or, as the little boys in the village used to say, "like Botherem Banks, with his breeches half-way up his legs."

Now, that he should so have delighted in wearing such brief trews was strange, passing strange, considering how serviceable length and breadth in those articles of dress might have been in concealing the deformity of his intractable opponents; but no, all the coaxing in the world would never induce him to wear them like other men; there was but one reason that could possibly be assigned for this strange vagary, which was, his utter abhorrence of straps, and probably his determined resolve never

to appear in such unsentimental things, prompted Botherem to have his trowsers made entirely out of reach ; and certes it would have taken some good half yard or more to pass from one side to the other of the terminating hem of those economically brief attachments.

"What!" he would exclaim, "a poet put on straps—never, never! William Shakspeare wore them not; fancy John Milton donning such things! A mighty bard in the moment of inspiration stooping to button on a piece of leather. Ha, ha!" laughed Botherem, "*could* such things be? Avaunt, the very notion! Byron—let me pause, ah! *Byron* might, but then he is no model—none, for me. I aim at perfection, I have set my mark on high, and there shall all my arrows reach. My name is unknown now, or known but to the few, though it *shall* blaze, and strike with wonder nations afar, and generations yet unborn!

"Yes, Fame shall greet me from afar—  
Shall trumpet forth my name—  
Shall place me on the pedestal,  
Where I'll for aye remain!"

But to return to the subject of nankeens and straps—the insufficiency of the one, and total absence of the other. Now, fair reader, fancy an enormously roomy boot, in company with an exceedingly short, tight, very-much-washed-out pair of the afore-mentioned garments; then imagine the wearer of these articles kneeling at a lady's feet, pouring forth whole volumes of love and devotion; imagine, likewise, that in the vehemence of his passionate address, the feet, as well as tongue, and hands, have moved about with every impressive word; and then picture to your mind's eye the lover rising, with a face in which every-

thing rueful and piteous is strongly marked ; big tears rolling down his dough-coloured cheeks, the extreme ends of those ill-conditioned nankeens sticking half in and half out the mouth of these doeskin consumers ; eyes staring, hair erect, mouth wide open, hands stretched forth, knees knocking. Fancy all this, and then say, sweet maiden, couldst thou love such an one ?—or couldst thou do other than fair Bertha did—turn aside and smile ? But of that anon.

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### CHAPTER III.

"I CANNOT imagine, Botherem, why you will persecute Miss Murray in the way you do," said Esther, roused out of her usually quiet manner, and speaking louder, and more harshly than perhaps she had ever done in her life before, provoked beyond endurance at the excessive absurdity of some remarks poor Botherem, encouraged by his other sister's seeming approval of his flourishes, had been pouring forth to his heart's content. "You surely must have seen, long ago, that your attentions are anything but pleasing, if not altogether disagreeable."

"Pray, dear Esther, don't be wroth with your loving brother," said Botherem, deprecatingly. "I am sure you cannot mean what you say ; besides, you know as well as I do, that no woman ever feels displeased at having a poet for her lover."

"Powers of patience !" laughed the merry Rhoda,—"you surely have not been annoying Miss Murray with any more of your poetical tomfooleries,

Botherem ! Why, I declare, if a man were to worry me with his devotion, in the way you do that poor girl, I would swear the peace against him—I would, positively.”

“Yes, yes, I do not doubt *you* capable of any such exploit.”

“Well, but you know, dear Botherem——”

“Now, I do beseech, Margaret, you will not inflict a lecture upon me. You know I abominate being talked to, above all things ; and what any of you can possibly mean by making use of such words as ‘worry,’ and ‘persecute,’ I cannot for an instant imagine. I am sure Miss Murray is not insensible to my devoted attachment. She never displayed towards me anything that could be construed by the most critical observer into such a feeling as you would imply. Quite the reverse ! And I beseech of you, sisters, to be more guarded in your expressions for the future, with reference to those sentiments existing between Bertha Murray and myself. That I am not indifferent to her, I feel perfectly satisfied. Antipathy—worry ! Powers of love ! the words sound harshly in mine ears ! What, I would ask, could any woman breathing see in me, in connexion with such hateful expressions ?

“No, no ; if the devoted attention, the respectful demeanour, the ardent admiration, the intense love displayed in all my actions, words, and ways, when in Miss Murray’s presence, will not win her affections,—nay, I say *not, will not*, for I feel convinced I am anything but indifferent to her,—I know little about what woman’s heart is made of.”

“How can you indulge in such vain hopes, Botherem ? for vain I’m sure they are. And then your so continually writing such outrageous high-flown

rhymes to her ! Just fancy Captain Murray getting hold of some such effusion as that you shewed me yesterday, and reading it aloud, accompanying every odd expression with a burst of his light, gay, laughter ! Upon my word, Botherem, it will hardly bear thinking of ! We shall become quite a byeword ! I declare I could cry, from pure vexation !”

“Lord bless us ! what a fuss you’re always making about nothing, Esther ! We did monstrously well before you came home, and I’m quite certain Botherem might have had Bertha—and—and—the Captain could come here oftener, if it were not for you ! You are always throwing cold water upon everybody, and everything.”

“I have no wish to throw cold water upon anyone, or anything, Charlotte ; I only want to prevent Botherem’s making himself ridiculous ; and how it is possible I can be the cause of breaking off a match, that to my poor judgment appears about as likely ever to have entered the imagination of *one* of the parties at least, as if love-making and marriage never existed, is altogether inexplicable to me.”

“Ah, that may be all very well for a woman at your time of life to talk so, but us younger ones have different ideas upon those subjects. I’m quite sure, if it had not been for you, we should be very good friends with the Murrays ; but you’ve such a nasty, proud, sarcastic way with you—’tis quite disgusting to everybody.”

“Thank you, Charlotte—thank you ! You are really most particularly kind, to say nothing of the attendant politeness ! But how I can in any way have interfered with your visitings at Darcey Hall, is, I confess, somewhat enigmatical ; for when I

first came home, so far from there being anything like intimacy existing between the two families, I was rather struck with the cold, distant way in which they always returned those very affectionate greetings offered by more than one member of our family; so, if you will enlighten me as to how far *I* am implicated in this weighty matter, I shall feel obliged."

"Yes, to be sure, that can easily be done. Why were you so ill-natured as to refuse the invitation Bertha Murray sent you, soon after her brother came home? Of course, she could not suppose a woman of your age would be foolish enough to think about going to a ball, but you might have accepted it for us younger ones. We should like to have gone above all things; though you knew that, and that's why you refused it. You are so jealous of your younger sisters, I declare 'tis quite disgusting!"

"Upon my word, Charlotte, you have involved the case in more mystery than ever. Surely, if they were so very anxious to cultivate your acquaintance, they have had many long years in which to achieve so desirable an action. Then, again, if it was *your* society they coveted, why wait until *my* return, and then send the first invitation ever received to *me*, if it was intended for *you*?"

"To be sure, that was the very thing. Designing mothers, and artful sisters, who have handsome sons and brothers, ready to fall in love with the first good-looking girl they see, are careful enough to keep everybody from the house who may chance to be dangerous. I dare say neither Mrs. Darcey, nor Miss Murray, felt at all anxious about the Captain's being too friendly with us younger ones, and I'll be bound *he* made his sister send that in-

invitation—for, of course, as I said before, they could not be foolish enough to imagine a woman at your time of life would be such an owl as to go; and, doubtless, he thought it would be a good way of inviting us, never dreaming, I'll venture to say, that we should allow you to refuse it; nor should you, I'd have taken good care, only you were in such a prodigious hurry to answer her note, that we knew nothing about the matter till it was too late."

"Very true; nor did I see the slightest occasion to consult any one about it. The note was addressed to me, the invitation expressly given to me, without reference to any other member of our family. I had my own reasons for refusing to go, which I do not choose to state at this precise moment, so I think it would be better to drop the subject altogether, for I hate quarrelling, and really our discussions generally assume that very disagreeable form. Margaret, will you go as far as Hamer's with me? I want some cotton, and I think I heard you say you were going to the post-office."

"No, Margaret can't go with you; she's going with me."

"Well, then, I suppose I must e'en go' alone, for I know Rhoda and Martha are engaged."

"I'm sure you need not be afraid to walk through the village by yourself; nobody will run away with you."

"I should hope not, Charlotte," replied Esther, laughing; "I should hope not, for were any cavalier so bold as to attempt such a gallant exploit, methinks he would be right glad to be quit of his prisoner ere he had run many miles. If you cannot accompany me, Margaret, I must manage to do without you. Good bye."



"Good bye, and thank'ee," said Charlotte, as Esther closed the door.

"I cannot think how you can be so unkind to poor Esther; she never interferes with us, and I'm sure she is anything but disagreeable. It is not fair to be so ill-natured to her."

"Well, I wish to goodness Mrs. Fenmore had either lived a little longer, or done something for Esther, so that she might never have come home to torment us; we did a vast deal better, and were far more comfortable while she was away; we *were* allowed to have parties then, but I declare 'tis enough to hip one to death, living in the way we do now; a parcel of stuff she's always putting into mamma's head, about expense, and such sort of rubbish. What concern is it of hers, I should like to know? We sha'n't ask her to pay our bills, I dare say. If she wasn't quite so old and ugly, one might hope some simpleton would take pity on her; but as it is, I see not the slightest chance of ever getting rid of her again; and then, to hear what a fuss people make about her; there's no walking two steps, but one's tormented with inquiries after her previous health. 'How is your sister? I trust she is well; we see so little of her, that one hardly knows whether she is at home or not. Give my kind regards to her, and tell her I hope she will come and see me soon.' When I'm alone, I never pretend to understand which they mean, and invariably answer as if it was some of you they were asking after. I declare I could have killed that nasty whiney-piney Mrs. Bates the other day. You know she affects to be a great admirer of Esther's; well, I was so provoked at the little idiot, I should like to have beaten her on the spot."

"Why, what offence could she possibly commit to call for such summary justice, Charlotte?" said Margaret, laughing.

"'Dear me,' lisped the little piece of affectation; 'it is you, Miss Charlotte, is it? Well, I'm so glad I've met you, for I want to know how your sister is; 'tis such an age since she called upon me, that I begin to fear I am forgotten; give my kind love to her, and say if she could make it convenient to come and spend a day with me, I should be delighted.'

"'I certainly will deliver your message, Mrs. Bates, but I understood my sister had called upon you yesterday; I suppose I must have mistaken what she said,' I replied.

"'Oh, that was Miss Martha, but of course you know I mean your sister Esther. By the way,' said she, turning to Captain Goldburn, (you know handsome Goldburn, girls, as he is called, don't you? I can't fancy what makes him so fond of being seen about with that little piece of trumpery; they are always together;) 'By the way,' lisped she, 'that is a treat I have in store for you, Goldburn; I want to introduce you to this lady's sister, Miss Banks.'

"Now, just fancy the old hag's impudence—she wanted to introduce him to Esther as a *treat* for-sooth, and there had I been standing full five minutes staring him in the face, and the little asp never alluded to me, excepting when she said, with a flourish of her hand, 'this lady's sister.' I felt as if I could have knocked her down, that I did."

"Lor! well, Charlotte, never grieve because stupid little Mrs. Bates has fallen in love with

Esther ; do allow some one to like her ; it is not because you and I don't think her perfection, that others may not."

" Ah, you ! yes, you just let her lead you as she pleases ; if others choose to bow and beck to her, 'tis more than I do ; she shall never domineer over me, I can tell her."

" I really don't think she wants to domineer over any of us, but it is so foolish of you ; you know she is the eldest *now*, and I can't think why you should always want to be mistress when she is in the way. Only just let her have her proper position in the house ; don't interfere with her, and I'm sure she won't trouble you."

" Ah, well ! 'tis all very fine talking ; but if you were not as blind as bats, you would have seen long ago, we've no chance when she's present ; whoever thinks of talking to us when Esther's in the room ?"

" Oh ! pray don't make yourself uneasy on that score, upon *my* account at least, I beseech of you. I get quite as much attention as I wish for, whether Esther be present or not," replied Martha, somewhat tartly, for she did not relish the idea of being looked upon, even by Charlotte, as second in personal attractions to any one of the family.

" Well, I tell you once for all, there will be no peace in this house, until that woman is out of it. I am not going to be made a nonentity to please her ; I won't give way an inch ; I was always mistress while she was from home, and I'm not going to give up to her, let people think what they may ; no, that I won't if I die for it !"

" Stoutly resolved, Charlotte."

" Foolishly resolved, Charlotte."

" Unkindly resolved, Charlotte."

" You may gabble on as you like ; I have said it ;

and when once I'm resolved upon a thing, no power on earth shall turn me from it."

"Ah! that depends upon circumstances; what may be commendable firmness in a *good* cause is wilful obstinacy in a *bad* one."

"I'll tell you what it is, young ladies," said Botherem, starting up from the sofa, upon which he had been reclining for the last half hour, "I'll tell you what it is—fall in love, or get some one to fall in love with you—write poetry and——"

"Make ourselves as absurd as you do."

"And then," continued Botherem, not deigning to notice the interruption, "you will have neither time nor inclination to squabble about whether one or the other shall order our leg of mutton for dinner, or take the presidential chair when your lady mother is out of the way:

"Oh woman! lovely woman fair,  
Why take ye all this thought and care?  
Why bicker, squabble, founce and pout,  
Or why 'bout nothings make a rout?"

"There, sweet sisters, is not that fine—quite an impromptu?"

"Quite; all but the first line, and I think no one would accuse you of plagiarism as far as the others are concerned," said Martha, sneeringly.

"Martha, my dear, I shall never make a poet of thee, thou——"

"I trust not; I have no ambition that way."

"Thou," continued Botherem, who never heeded interruption, nor allowed the thread of his ideas, as he chose to call his odd vagaries, to be broken, "thou hast no poetry, no sensibility, no pathos, no inspiration; thy soul is blank. I pity thee—  
from my heart of hearts I pity thee!"

"Thank you, Botherem, I am much beholden to you," replied Martha, laughing, for none of them ever thought of being angry with their poor silly, good-natured brother; "and I am sure I ought to be very grateful for your kind commiseration of my unhappy, unenlightened state; but really I doubt whether I shall be either better or worse for your sympathetic condolence."

"Permit me to say——"

"Lor! there, Botherem, go and write your poetry, and don't worry; if you'd just join with us in persuading the old lady to send Esther out to board, there might be some chance of happiness; but you are such a goose there's no beating sense into you."

"Shall I explain to thee, my lovely sister, why——"

"Oh, no! we want none of your explanations. Come, you'd better go and employ yourself about something; you've been laying lazying there long enough, I'm sure."

"Dear Charlotte, pray do not be angry with Botherem; I am sure he never interferes with us; I cannot endure to see any one cross to him; he is always good-natured, and never quarrels with anybody."

"Thank you, gentle Margaret; thou hast ever some kind word to put in for me. I will write a sonnet on thy pretty eyebrows. How shall it begin?"

"Just where it ends, Botherem, for I think the less said about my eyebrows the better."

"Not so, sister mine, for I think that portion of thy pretty face might match Venus's own."

"Of a certainty I shall begin to get quite conceited if you flatter me in this way, Botherem."

"No fear of that; you have far too much good sense ever to be vain."

"'Pon my word, Botherem's coming out, I think," said Martha.

"Yes, I think so too; he'll become quite a courtier before long, if he goes on in this way," laughed Rhoda.

"When did you see Henry Beetham, Charlotte? Was he at church on Sunday?"

"Oh, yes! and followed us home. How he does stare."

"I think he is a very rude man, that is my opinion of him, and ever has been."

"Well, now, I don't think so," said Martha.

"I quite agree with Rhoda. I hate a man who will stand and stare one out of countenance; it is so very ungentlemanlike and disagreeable."

"Lor, Margaret! you're as ridiculously particular as Esther pretends to be; 'tis all very well for a woman who has past her prime, and is not over good-looking, to draw herself up and pretend indifference about the men; but with all her prudery Esther's just as fond of the beaux as we are."

"I differ from you there, Charlotte; I really believe Esther cares no more about the whole race than she does for so many green pippins."

"No, not about the *whole* race, Margaret; but it strikes me Esther has seen a *green pippin* somewhere, or at some time, that she would not throw back into the basket, if she had her choice of keeping it," said Rhoda, laughing.

"Right, right, Rhoda! and I am convinced that is the ground-work of all what we call her disagreeable ways."

"If I thought *that*, Martha," said Charlotte, "I

would not be quite so hard upon her ; but lor, no ! stuff, it can't be ; what man would ever dream of falling in love with such an ugly woman as Esther !”

“ Why, you see, Charlotte, if some one had fallen in love with her, instead of her falling in love with some one, that would alter the case altogether ; my firm conviction is, our Esther has seen somebody she likes, and *that* somebody either don't like her, or don't suspect she likes them, and so you see——”

“ Serves her right too ; I've no patience with a woman who can lower herself so as to fall in love with a man that don't care two straws for her. I never pity such people.”

“ Take care, Charlotte, don't you talk too largely ; love is no respecter of persons, and you, with all your valour, may be waylaid some of these odd days, and taken captive.”

“ I suspect Charlotte understands something more about that kind of warfare than we give her credit for. How is Frank Furgesson, Charlotte, eh ?”

“ Now, I'm not going to put up with any of your impertinence, Rhoda,” said she, trying to look angry, though by no means feeling ill pleased, for Charlotte was one of those young ladies who rather liked being quizzed, and had not the slightest objection at having as many handsome beaux set down to her account, as her friends thought proper to score up for her.

“ Come now, Charlotte, be honest ; do tell us all about Frank ; I'm sure I never disguise my love affairs.”

“ No, because you've so many, Rhoda.”

“ To be sure ! I should not think I was worth

looking at, if I had less than half-a-dozen sweet-hearts at one time."

"Then, what a terrible fright I must be, for you know I never get any!"

"Oh! Margaret, Margaret! how can you tell such fibs? Why, have you not run away with the great man of the village, and made all the young ladies in Hazelmere wear willow garlands, instead of orange blossoms, as some of them had hoped for!"

"Who are you talking about, Rhoda?"

"How can you be so deceitful, Margaret, as to pretend you don't understand me? Why, who *should* I mean but your old adorer Sir Goring Wigmore?"

"Upon my word, Rhoda," replied the pretty Margaret, laughing heartily, "you are *too* bad; I never look at that miserable old fop but it gives me a shivering fit."

"Pooh! Margaret; I'm sure you are very foolish to throw away such a good chance."

"A good chance, Rhoda; I don't believe Margaret has ever had the opportunity offered her of throwing it away."

"Now I know better, Martha; and I only wish I had stood in her shoes the while. Wouldn't I have said, 'Yes, sir, please, and thank'ee too'?"

"What a wild girl you are, Rhoda! Do you pretend to tell me you would have sold yourself to such a miserable old creature as Sir Goring Wigmore, simply because he is rich and has a title?"

"Oh! I don't care the value of pussy there for all his riches; but think how nice it would be to hear oneself called 'my lady;' ah! wouldn't I have a velvet dress with a train as long as our peacock's tail?"

"And do you think hearing yourself called 'my



lady,' and wearing a velvet dress with a long train to it, would make you happy, dear Rhoda?"

"You ask such home questions, Margaret. I did not say a word about happiness, because I fancy those who take Sir Goring Wigmore would chance to leave all that in the church on their wedding-day; but then I think it must be very nice to be rich and grand, and thought much of, don't you?"

"Indeed, I think quite the reverse! I am sure no one can be happy who marries for interest, nor do I think they deserve it."

"Now Margaret's going to give us a sermon, so I shall be off."

"So shall I, Martha; I hate lectures."

"Go on, Margaret; I like to hear you talk."

"No, no, Rhoda, I have nothing particular to say, only I hope, should Sir Goring Wigmore think fit to transfer his love from me to you, you will pause before you say, 'Yes, sir, and thank'ee too.'"

"I'll wait till I'm asked, dear Margaret."

"Then I am afraid you will wait long enough."

"I sha'n't fret about that, Martha."

"No, I should think not; a woman must want a husband indeed who would marry such an old horror as Sir Goring Wigmore."

"I do not think you owe the antiquated beau much love, Charlotte."

"Not I! I hate such mean old wretches."

"Come, don't let us make him out worse than he is."

"That would be a difficult matter, Martha."

"Don't be so very severe, Charlotte," laughed Margaret, gathering up her work and preparing to leave the room. "Come, who is going with me?"

"Why, you and I must call upon the Andrews;

we ought to have gone there a week ago. I declare we do behave very rude to those people."

"I cannot see that, Charlotte; I think we call upon them as often as they do upon us."

"Oh, no! I'm sure we don't."

"You'll never get me among them; a nasty set of satirical, disagreeable creatures; they could no more speak a kind word for any one than they could fly."

"My dear Rhoda, let us look at home before we find fault with others. I think our conversation this morning might beat the Andrews hollow."

"You are quite right, Botherem; we do get into a very bad habit of talking ill-naturedly about our friends. I only wish I could break myself of it; but I am sure evil speaking is a thing that if once people give way to, it steals upon them, and they often utter unkind and sarcastic words, without being aware that they are doing so."

"Why, now, what have we been saying this morning that is so very terrible, Margaret, I should like to know?"

"Nothing very terrible, Charlotte; no, certainly not, but I think there is a kind of asperity about our conversation now that we used not to indulge in."

"And who is to blame pray, but that disagreeable Esther? You own yourself it is only lately we have got into the way of evil speaking; it's entirely her fault."

"I cannot at all agree with you there, Charlotte; if you choose to view everything she says and does with a jaundiced eye, allow yourself to feel angry without cause, and suffer your temper to be ruffled for nothing, I must candidly own I consider it is *you* who are wrong, and not *Esther*."

"Ah, well! that's all very fine, I dare say. Come, do you mean to go out to-day or not?"

"Yes, certainly; and the sooner the better, for it is getting late. Are we to go to Andrews?"

"Not unless you like."

"Then I *don't* like."

"Very well; then suppose we all go to Blakebank's."

"Oh, delightful! The place Harry Beetham praises so highly, is it not?"

"Yes."

"I wish you would put your trip to Blakebank's off till another day, for you know Rhoda and I *must* go to Lovet's, and I should like to see that place so very much."

"To be sure we can; besides, the pleasure would be far greater if we all went together—would it not, Charlotte?"

"Quite right, Margaret; so let us fix to go there to-morrow," cried Rhoda.

"Well, to-morrow let it be then," said Charlotte. "Come, come, we shall never get out to-day if we stand chattering here—I'm off."

"And so am I."

"And I."

"And I," cried each of the girls as they left the room to prepare for their different pursuits.

Pity! that such good hearts should harbour one unkindly feeling.

## CHAPTER IV.

"WHAT! not even the shadow of a smile to greet me this bright morning, fair sister mine! Why, I vow you look as dismal as a sparrow in a snow-storm. One would imagine 'twere a lover instead of a brother, about to take his departure. Come, come, cheer up, dear Bertha; melancholy, they say, is infectious. Pray I may not catch it, seeing I've no very particular wish to be choked."

"Choked! Augustus, what do you mean by that?"

"Why, simply this—I have a most sovereign dread of that exceedingly unpleasant sensation, which wild harem-scarem folks in general, and myself in particular, are very subject to. I don't know if you ever felt it,—I suppose not; women can give relief to their griefs in tears; but for us, poor devils, we have no other way of getting rid of our sorrows, than by gulping them down.

"I remember when I was a younker at school, our dominie had a most extensive taste for turkeys; and some half dozen of the young knaves, my well-conducted self at their head, got certain strange vague notions into our noddles, about cramming those most hapless of all bipeds. I don't tell you our ideas upon the subject were very distinct; only I know that I was loudest in insisting that *cramming* meant *fattening*; and as our worthy master's birds were the leanest of the lean, we resolved, in the kind innocence of our guileless hearts, to increase their weight and bulk, by that very simple process; so, to enable us to carry

our amiable design into effect, we invariably rolled up all the bread we could spare from our allowance at each meal, into balls as hard as stones, and then, directly play-hours arrived, away we started to the corner where those disconsolate starvelings were gobbling and grumbling, and commenced the truly considerate operation of cramming.

"I would not positively assert, for I don't exactly remember, the amount of loss sustained by our erudite preceptor in his poultry-yard department, by our unwearying attentions; though certainly it was a matter of wonder, not only to him but to us, the unprecedented mortality that raged among them. However, that's not of much moment; what I was going to observe is, that I never feel the unpleasant sensation of which I just spoke, without glancing back in my mind's eye at those wretched, persecuted turkeys. Whenever a ball was thrust into their luckless gullets, gulp, gulp would they go, as if it was a very painful affair indeed. We did not understand what those miserable victims suffered then; but I suspect I have often and fully acquired the distressing knowledge since; for, whenever anything particularly vexatious comes in my way, gulp, gulp, goes my poor throat, like Doctor Screwem's turkeys."

"Dear Augustus, how you do run on; I declare there is no possibility of being grave, even for a moment, when you are present; you make one laugh, whether one will or not."

"Precisely, that is exactly what I wanted; and now you have condescended to smile, perhaps you will carry your kindness a little further, and tell me how I look in my new toggery."

"Not at all well, to my thinking, Augustus. I had rather, much rather, see you in your shooting-

jacket, Suremark over your shoulder, and Macbeth by your side, because then——”

“Because me no becauses, sweet sister, because then you think there might be some chance of the wild, thoughtless, rattle-pated sailor, becoming a steady, sedate, grave-looking, jogtrotting, dinner-eating, county squire and magistrate. No, no, that may be all very well some twenty years hence ; but I don't feel disposed to turn my back upon glory just yet, believe me. Fancy, with what an air of importance you would talk of “ my brother the admiral !”

“ An admiral ! Augustus, why, who ever thinks of an admiral, but as a wrinkled old man, with white hair, and one arm !”

“ Exactly ; well, and what can be more honourable than losing an arm, and getting wrinkled and white headed, in one's country's service ? I should be proud of such distinguishing marks, so nobly acquired.”

“ Should you ? Then I am sure your ideas and mine must be widely different upon the subject of glory.”

“ Yes, of course, and so they ought to be. What can a woman possibly understand about the exciting delights of being first and foremost in the rage and heat of a battle, where one may have the honourable distinction to be rendered minus arms, legs, head, life and all, in an instant ?”

“ Dear Augustus !” said his sister, imploringly, “ pray do not talk so ; it is so terrible.”

“ Well, well, I've done, Bertha ; but trust me, I don't intend laying up in ordinary just yet ; besides, think how exceedingly ungrateful it would be to the Lords High for all their kindness, were I to remain insensible to their discernment and good

opinion, by refusing one of the finest ships in the service when offered to me. No, no, Bertha, that would never do. I don't know what you may think about the matter, but believe me, I consider their lordships to have behaved most handsomely, and respect them accordingly."

"I wish the ship you speak so exultingly about had never been built, or your kind friends had found some other captain for her," replied Bertha. "I cannot endure the idea of your leaving us now. I have a strong foreboding that some evil is impending over us. It is foolish, nay, perhaps even wicked, to indulge in such feelings; but I cannot divest myself of the terrible notion that I shall never see you again."

"Now, out upon thee for a croaking raven! Are you not ashamed of yourself to talk in this way, Bertha? Do oblige me by allowing some of those dismal clouds that now obscure and darken your better judgment to be dispelled, by suffering the bright rays reflecting from these brilliant shoulder ornaments of mine, to fall upon your imagination in all their resplendent glory. Are they not monstrously becoming? I remember how proud I felt when first I mounted *one*. I little thought to have had a companion for it so soon. Many a man of seventy has walked, about with an individual epaulette; but very few at four-and-twenty can introduce two. Come now, tell me I look exceedingly imposing in my new dress: there is nothing like a little flattery; it puts one in good conceit of oneself."

"Why, if I were to tell you, you look extremely handsome, I should be saying no more than the truth," replied Bertha, gazing at him with a countenance in which all the fond pride and love of an

affectionate sister beamed out, and sparkled in her beautiful eyes.

And he *did* look handsome. Augustus Murray was one of those men upon whom the epithet of *splendid* might be well and truly bestowed; from the tip of his boot to the raven curls that clustered round his noble brow, not the most critical or fastidious could find a fault; and as he stood leaning against the marble mantel-piece, looking down, half grave, half gay, upon his lovely sister, attired in that most becoming and honourable of all uniforms, the full dress of a captain in our glorious navy, his was a form upon which men might look with admiration, and woman with love.

"Thank you, dear; I am greatly obliged by the compliment, and beg to return thanks accordingly."

"Must you really join your ship on Thursday week?" inquired Bertha.

"Really, truly, and most absolutely."

"Is it a healthy station you are going to?"

"Very."

"And pleasant?"

"A perfect paradise."

"I am glad of that."

"So am I, dear Bertha."

"Will it be three years before you come back again, Augustus?"

"Nearer four."

"What a time to look forward to!"

"It was rather longer last time."

"No, the time before."

"Ah! so it was."

"Yes; but, Augustus, you know we did not miss you so much then as we shall now."



"No," laughed Augustus; "because I was nothing but a little, snivelling middy at that time."

"You certainly were not quite as tall and formidable looking as you are now; but as to your ever having been a 'snivelling middy,' I really cannot exactly agree with you on that point."

"Why, did I not leave home in those days of my youth and innocence, with a tear-bedewed cheek, as your adorer, the poet Botherem, would have called my wet face and red eyes? By the way, Bertha, what has become of that prince of long words and bad rhymes? I have not beheld him for more than a week past."

"Nor I either. I suppose he has been employing himself upon that splendid effusion I found in the summer-house yesterday."

"Hang the fellow! Why, for mercy's sake, can't they make him turn his mind to some useful occupation, instead of letting him annoy honest, quiet people in this absurd way."

"Why, the fact is, I do not think he is capable of putting what few brains nature has bestowed upon him to anything like a serviceable purpose."

"Well, I don't know,—when the thing first began, I enjoyed it as much as any lover of fun and mischief could enjoy a good joke, and looked upon it as such; but I begin to fear the matter is going rather too far for your comfort, dear Bertha, and I'm resolved not to leave Darcey Hall until I can find out some way by which a stop may be put to all this vexatious folly."

"But how can that possibly be done, dear Augustus?"

"To tell truth, I've thought oftener and more seriously on the subject of late than, perhaps, you would feel disposed to give me credit for; and I

have come to the conclusion, that there is no other way of effectually getting quit of the silly oaf, and all his toin fooleries, than by enlisting his sister Esther in our cause."

"Dear Augustus, how could we possibly do that?"

"I don't think it so difficult as you seem to imagine."

"But, Augustus, which of us could say to Miss Banks, 'your brother is an exceedingly troublesome person, and you must——'"

"No, no; neither you nor I will be called upon to make uncivil speeches, depend upon it, to gain the desired end. Esther Banks is one of those keen-sighted, clear-headed persons, to whom a hint is as good as a volume; and what is more, I know she would only be too ready to further any plan by which she thought the grotesque absurdities of her poor witless brother might be ended."

"I quite agree with you there, Augustus; for I am certain his folly is far, far more vexatious to her than to us."

"Decidedly, without a doubt; she seems perfectly and absolutely horrified at his strange goings on, as well she might be, poor girl."

"You have seen a good deal of Esther Banks at different times, have you not?"

"Yes, certainly I have *seen* a great deal of her; but very little beyond seeing, for she always treated me with such coldness, that I hardly ever ventured to enter into conversation with her."

"It was at the Bedford where you met so often, was it not, Augustus?"

"Yes; why, Lord bless you, we were there for weeks at a time together."

- And yet she always seems to treat you as you were almost a stranger."

- Indeed she does : unfortunately so."

- Is her manner invariably as reserved and distant as she appears to be ?"

- No, quite the reverse : I've seen her face abnormally beaming with animation and excitement.

- How strange ! strange, I mean, she should possibly assume a manner that, to those who do not know her, seems almost repulsive."

- I'll tell you what, Bertha, Esther Banks is no more like the creature people take her for, than I'm like Jupiter."

- Why, Augustus, I begin half to suspect you have fallen in love with her," said his sister, laughing.

"Fallen in love with Esther Banks," replied Augustus slowly ; "no, she never gave me an opportunity ; but I might fall in love with one less loveable, believe me, Bertha."

"Why, Augustus ?"

"Why, Bertha, what have you to say against my assertion ?"

"Oh ! nothing, nothing ; only you appear to me two such extremely opposite beings, that I should never fancy you could admire her, or——"

"She me."

"No, I don't mean that, Augustus, be fully assured."

"Well, never mind, dear Bertha, 'tis a matter we won't discuss just now ; I want to mature my plan, and think by what *ruse* I shall be able to get her to listen to me, for do without her we can't."

"It will be rather a difficult matter, I fear."

"I fear so too ; but still it shall be done, that I am resolved upon."

"Do you not think it would be a very painful subject to enter upon with her ?"

"Yes; but the end must justify the means; it will benefit her fully as much as us."

"Most assuredly."

"I am yet doubtful how it is to be managed, though; what do you think, Bertha?"

"Upon my word, I am wholly unable to give you any advice, Augustus."

"Then you are less clever than I had given you credit for, sweet sister."

"Why, upon any other matter perhaps, Augustus," said his sister, smiling, "I might be able to aid you with my sage council; but here, I must own, I feel completely puzzled."

"Ay, true; 'tis rather a delicate affair," laughed Augustus, "more especially as the swain has made so deep an impression on your heart."

"*Head*, say rather, Augustus; for I must candidly confess it is often many hours after I have seen him before I can gravely think of anything but the bard's fantastic form,—so strange, so oddly attired!"

"Well, then, surely I must be the most savage, cruel, ruthless, relentless, tyrannical, unfeeling of all stony-hearted relatives, thus perseveringly to insist upon driving away in despair the poet-lover, for whom his fair mistress, (or soul's idol, isn't it?) has owned the tender flame!"

"It must be a *very* tender one indeed, if it is any at all," laughed Bertha.

"Well, never mind, I'm not inquisitive. Do you know, Bertha, it has often struck me how much I should like to borrow a pair of the bard's dress nankeens, by way of pattern!"

"Augustus, Augustus! how can you be so absurd?"

"Pon my word, I should! only it would be re-

quisite for him to see me in them, that he might be enabled to sound their praises, and perpetuate their beauties in verse ; for, however *distingué* he may appear in those adornments, I am certain their effect upon me would be ten times more imposing !”

“Augustus, you will be the death of me if you go on in this way,” said his sister, in a convulsion of laughter. “How can such ridiculous ideas get into your head ?”

“Dear me, I thought I was talking unusually sensibly,” replied Augustus, with mock gravity, “and exceedingly complimentary to the poet’s taste. Do you think he has any straps to lend ?”

“Not only none to lend, but none to wear,” replied Bertha, wiping the merry tears from her beautiful eyes, “at least so I should imagine, as I’ve never yet seen him in any.”

“Well, Bertha, if I could but pick up such another curiosity as your lover, Botherem Banks, poet and gentleman, in the course of my travels, I should deem myself an immeasurably lucky fellow, and look upon my fortune as being made at once.”

“If your fortune is never made, Augustus, until you find a second Botherem Banks, I fear you will go to your grave a poor man.”

“I fear so too ; he certainly is the most *outré* thing in the human form it was ever my chance to behold ; and however you can resist the temptation of laughing outright in his face when he makes those hideous mouths at you, is more than I am able to comprehend.”

“It *is* rather a hard trial, I must candidly confess ; but, poor creature, I really think he is far more to be pitied than blamed.”

“Nonsense, Bertha ! You allow the kindness

of your feelings to get the better of your judgment. Had the fellow been born an actual idiot, a creature without either sense or reason, I could have compassionated his state as sympathizingly as you do ; but such is not the case ; his intellects are sufficiently serviceable for all the ordinary purposes of everyday life ; he knows right from wrong, and can keep out of harm's way.

"Had his father, instead of wanting to make a doctor of him, sent the numscull to sea, means would soon have been found to make a rational being of him. Put such a fellow as that under my command for six months, and I fancy, Bertha, you would feel rather proud of the reformation wrought in the brains, habits, and fashions, of one in whose welfare you take so deep an interest."

"Well, Augustus, I dare say you are right, only it would take an immense stretch of imagination on my part, to suppose that all the drilling, tuition, or coercion, in the world, could ever make a sailor of Botherem Banks, if they are all like the few specimens I have seen."

"Thank you, Bertha ; you have the prettiest way of paying a gratifying compliment of any woman I ever met with."

"Indeed, Augustus, I meant it not as a compliment ; I was only speaking the true sentiments of my heart ; and I say again I am certain Botherem Banks would never make a sailor."

"Not a Drake, a Rodney, or a Nelson, certainly ; but you know there are grades in all professions."

"True," laughed Bertha ; "and I suspect our poet would be classed among the very lowest grade. What portion of a ship's duty could he possibly perform ?"

"Deck swabbing !"

"No, I do not think he could even do it has hardly strength enough."

"We'd make him drink grog, and then bring out his energies."

"Dear Augustus," laughed Bertha, "that indeed be the height of cruelty. What! the sensitively refined Poet Botherem, who tasted anything stronger than water, to such horrible stuff as sailor's grog is made! Oh, fie! it would be the death of him!"

"Not so; he'd soon learn to like it."

"He might be made to *drink* it, but *like* it."

"Don't you mistake, Bertha; people who understandings are like parrots and monkey taught to imitate—imitation leads to the habit to liking."

"Indeed!" said Bertha, demurely. "I am quite certain of that, Augustus?"

"Quite. There is nothing, I am convinced, the thing be ever so disagreeable or repulsive at first, but that we may, by persevering customing ourselves to its use or sight, overcome our original antipathy, but become time to *like* that which we at first looked upon with distaste and aversion."

"This, then, is your firm belief?"

"Decidedly. I have heard it said the second nature; now I differ from the saying uttered that wise axiom *in toto*; for to my thinking even our very nature itself may be changed by habit. What is there we may not either undo by use? I say, use *first*, nature *second*."

"So you really think, that by daily accustoming ourselves to any one particular thing or for a considerable length of time, let that thing

person, once have been ever so distasteful to us, we may at last not only endure, but absolutely admire, even in despite of our better judgment, that, which but a short time back we could scarcely contemplate without aversion and disgust," said Bertha, still looking very grave, and speaking in a low, thoughtful tone.

"I do really think so," replied Augustus (somewhat puzzled at the serious, nay, almost solemn manner in which his sister had put her questions) — "I do indeed!"

"Then," said Bertha, suddenly looking up, while a gay bright smile beamed on her beautiful countenance, and dimpled the corners of her sweet mouth—"Then, Augustus, take Botherem Banks to sea with you."

"Aha! aha! aha!" shouted her brother, "I'm fairly caught, Bertha! Why, you artful little toad! how could I possibly suspect all those earnest inquiries regarding my belief of my own assertions were put with the view of catching me in my own trap? But then, you know, Bertha, there is never a general rule without its exception—and your lover must make the exception."

"Well, Augustus, if you wont take him off my hands in that way, tell me what other course you mean to pursue?"

"No, no, that's not fair. You refuse to assist me with your counsel, and I decline letting you into my secret—as yet, at least—for I suspect you'll have the principal part to act in the forthcoming drama, after all."

"Farce or comedy, Augustus! I fancy the affair, let it end how it may, will lay greater claim to the ludicrous than the pathetic."



"Oh, that's more than can be answered for— Suppose our poet should die of grief?"

"Such natures as his rarely sink under the oppression of sorrow. His feelings are far too easily excited ever to dwell long upon any one thing, let it be grave or gay."

"How can you say so, Bertha? Has he not dwelt upon your image for a space of time almost too distant for recollection to recall?"

"Yes; but then remember, Augustus, his present 'passion' is a *fancy*, not a *feeling*."

"Not a *feeling*! What! Botherem, the poet, over head and ears in love, and his 'soul's idol' refusing even the cold name of *feeling* to his absorbing adoration! Oh, cruel, cruel Bertha!"

"Certainly. I have no hesitation in saying, that I am fully persuaded people born with such fleeting fancies as Botherem Banks do not *feel*. Their imaginations are easily wrought upon, and, for the moment, their expressions, either of joy or grief, are loud and vehement, but it soon passes. Those who talk much about what they feel, never *really* feel at all. I venture to say, were Botherem Banks giving a description of any very melancholy scene he might chanced to have witnessed, he would make his auditors believe his heart was wrung, and almost broken, by the terrible afflictions of those whose suffering he so laboriously and sentimentally deplored; though, perhaps, the next hour he would think no more about these horrors than if they had never existed. So, let your fiat be what it may, trust me, neither Augustus nor Bertha Murray will be chargeable with the death of Botherem Banks."

"No, it is to be hoped not," laughed her brother. "I would rather he should live many a long

day yet, to amuse the multitude; and, so that we are not the sufferers, I care not how absurd the Creature is."

"Come, come, do be good-natured, Augustus," said Bertha, coaxingly; "you have raised my curiosity, do not refuse to gratify it. I am very anxious to know how you mean to proceed."

"When I have quite settled the matter in my own mind, fair Bertha, you shall know; but as my present plan will not prove so feasible as I had at first imagined, I must take time to hit upon some other form of action; and it being a matter wholly beyond my power to talk while I'm thinking, or think while I'm talking, I shall wish you good morning, and walk forth to contemplate upon this important business."

"Good-bye, dear Augustus! I will wait the result of your sage cogitations with what patience I may; only, do not implicate me in the matter further than you can possibly help."

"I make no promises," said Augustus, laughingly, as he left the room, "and none will I be held answerable for."

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## CHAPTER V.

"WELL, I am very particularly delighted that most unbearably disagreeable gentleman has thought fit to take his departure at last," said Rhoda Banks, bounding into the room, as she heard the house door shut upon a morning visitor. "In the name of all that is wonderful, Martha, however can you encourage such a decoction of verjuice and wormwood as that stiff backed, sour-faced, amalgama-

tion of hateful venom, self-conceit, spiteful vituperation, and malignant defamation—Captain Solomon Peter Rumford?”

“I don't encourage him, Rhoda; and I am sure you cannot think him more perfectly disagreeable than I do.”

“I'm marvellously pleased to hear that, Martha; for only think of the state—the terrible state our family would be in, were you cruel enough to add such a branch to it as the crab-apple Captain! Alas! for my bread and milk! Why, I should never be able to eat another luncheon while he belonged to us. His very shadow passing by the pails is enough to turn their contents into whey. What a lemon it is!”

“Come, come, Rhoda.”

“Go, go, Margaret. I'll say my say, let who may stand by; nor shall e'en you, fair sister, baulk me of my humour. I love to shoot at folly as it flies; and if he's not a sure and proper aim, I know not where to find one.”

“But then, Rhoda——”

“But then—what then, Margaret? You know I never laugh at kind or good-natured people, nor seek for faults that lie beyond the surface. For instance, now, there's dear, little, curious, queer, old, odd, strange-looking, Miss Tramperton, whom all the parish makes such fun of, and who certainly would deserve an entire and separate apartment to her own individual unique self, were she offered as a rare specimen of the genus Feminine, to any museum in any part of England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Isle of Man, and the Orkneys inclusive; to say nothing about Hanover, Canada, and our British possessions in India, &c., &c. Now I affirm, that so far from Miss Bridget Tramperton being an object of ridicule, when com-

pared with Captain Peter Solomon Rumford, R.N., my firm conviction is, that she is a creature of love, and to be loved. Indeed, I never see the dear little soul without feeling an overwhelming inclination to take her up in my arms and kiss her.

"Who ever heard Bridge Tram, as that impudent Harry Betham calls my pet, speak an ill or unkind word of any breathing being? Where good is going on, there will Bridge Tram be found; but the moment she hears a spiteful tongue in play, away she flies, as though some evil were pursuing her. Dear little creature, she is a perfect jewel, and I love her sincerely."

"And so do I, Rhoda, she is a worthy, estimable, valuable woman, and it can be only those who know nothing of her that could be foolish or wicked enough to hold her up to ridicule."

"Thank you, Esther. I always like to have my opinion confirmed by you, because you never say anything but what is straightforward, sterling, honest good sense, and that which may be relied upon, and repeated."

"And thank you, dear Rhoda," replied Esther, while a grateful tear glittered beneath her half-closed eyelids; for either from her own cold, reserved manner, or that they had few ideas in common, the sisters rarely conversed; and seldom indeed had it chanced, that a speech so gratifying as the one just uttered by Rhoda was bestowed by any of them upon their newly found and little loved sister.

It would have sounded strange, nay, almost inexplicable, had any one hinted to some of those girls a suspicion that they were jealous of their plain-looking, dowdy-dressing, unpretending elder sister; for as such the greater number of them chose to consider her; and to have said, "How can you

be so jealous of Esther," would have caused the colour to rise, and the eyes to open in perfect amazement and wonder; yet, strange as it may appear, not only to themselves, but to others, *they were* jealous of her; not indeed of herself, but of the place she occupied.

As it has been before remarked, Esther Banks was taken from her home when a mere infant, and brought up by a distant relative. Once or twice, certainly not oftener, the little Esther had been taken to see her family for a few days, but as she soon perceived, even when quite a child, that she was no favourite among her sisters, she very early ceased to feel much interest in those who evidently looked upon her as an intruder; and for many years before the death of her kind protector, Esther Banks had not visited her home, or seen one of her relations.

Unfortunately, most unfortunately for her, poor girl, Mrs. Fenmore was seized with sudden illness; and having foolishly from day to day put off that indispensable duty of making her will, until it was too late, Esther Banks returned to her family with no other provision than a small insurance which Mrs. Fenmore had effected on her own life. This was doubly trying to Esther, for, from what her former friend had more than hinted, it was clearly understood that she meant to leave the whole of her property, which was very considerable, to her adopted daughter; and when poor Esther returned with little more than would serve the purpose of pin-money, an occasional taunt of "People who had been grandly brought up, and who talked largely about their riches, being obliged at last to come home with scarcely a guinea in their purses, to be kept," and many such painful inuendos, certainly tended in no small degree to estrange what

feeling of affection might have existed in the breast of Esther towards her sisters on her first return to her native home; and they could ill brook the idea, that one whom they chose to consider as an intruder should be looked upon by servants and friends as first and foremost in the domestic arrangements.

Hence continual bickerings took place, and endless sarcasms were hurled at poor Esther's head; and truly, as Charlotte said, though not in fault, "Esther was the cause of all this mischief."

How strange it is, that those who are gifted by nature with every good and amiable quality, will yet suffer some trifling, foolish, insignificant thing to jaundice their views, and embitter their feelings.

Charlotte Banks was a truly good-natured, kind-hearted, affectionate, obliging girl; yet the vexatious thought, that Esther should be considered more of than herself, rendered her spiteful, and sullied many of her better qualities. It was not that she couldn't bear a superior,—far, far otherwise; she was willing to cede any and everything to her other sisters; she liked to see them admired and courted, and did all in her power to set them off to the best advantage; she loved them, and they loved her. Among *them*, there was not a jarring note; but poor Esther! alas! that such thing should be! To Charlotte she was like Mordecai in the gate, causing disquiet, though, like the man whom "the king delighted to honour," wholly unconscious of giving offence.

It was the painful conviction of how small a share she had in the sympathies and affections of those around her, that caused the grateful tear to start in Esther's eye when Rhoda made that gratifying speech we have already noticed.

Ah! could those sisters but have guessed the warm heart that glowed beneath that calm and cold exterior, would they have looked upon her as a stranger, as one careless of regard.

She was too proud to ask for that love they never offered, and they thought of her as of one upon whom affection would be thrown away.

Could the secrets of our hearts be read in our faces, how much of misery might be spared us?

Poor Esther! thy life has been a sad and sorrowful pilgrimage. With a heart glowing with love for all thy fellow-creatures, thou wilt go to thy grave under the bitter conviction that no human being ever loved or cared for thee.

"I'll tell you what I was going to say about Captain Crabapple," said Rhoda, in her merriest tone, after a momentary pause, in which she had thrown a searching glance at Esther, struck by the unusual quivering of her voice; and as Rhoda saw the tear gather in her eye, and roll slowly down her cheek, she felt very much as if she could go and kiss it off. However, she checked herself with the usual reflection, "that all love would be thrown away upon Esther;" but she made a resolve in her inmost heart, that no unkind word should ever again pass her lips, no unkind thought should ever prompt her to do aught which might vex or annoy her. "If I cannot love her, I will respect her," thought Rhoda; "and yet, if she would let me, I could love her too. I wish we had not been separated so long; but it is too late to grieve about that now; I fear we shall never be friends with Esther;" and as this idea crossed the kind-hearted girl, she felt as if she could weep, that she dared not tell the affection thus strong within her; and fearing lest she might betray more of feeling than

she wished to shew, she turned to Margaret with her merry chat about the crabbed Captain.

"Well, and what were you going to say, dear Rhoda?"

"Why, do you know, Margaret, I never hear the gallant captain talk, but I think of those small stone bottles one sees by the road-side, in the little green barrows on a hot, dusty day. Fiz, fiz, fiz they go, and only seem to be watching an opportunity to fly out in the face of that luckless wight who should be bold enough to cut their restraining wire."

"Well, but Rhoda, I don't at all see the analogy," said Martha.

"Don't you, Martha? Why, fiz, fiz, goes the Captain; his whole conversation is nothing but one continued fiz, and he only wants contradiction, which is cutting the bottle's wire, to fly out in the face of that daring bold, who would be fool-hardy enough to venture on so fearful an exploit."

"What an impudent wag you are, Rhoda. Who in the name of patience would ever have thought of comparing the gallant and right valiant Captain Peter Solomon Rumford, to a small stone bottle of ginger-beer, placed in a green barrow by the road side on a hot day?"

"Those who'd seen the bottles, and heard him talk, Margaret," laughed Rhoda.

"Well, well, dear Rhoda, I suppose you must say your say; for when you're in this humour, there's no possibility of stopping you, that I know full well."

"No, to be sure; and I haven't brought half my charges against him yet."

"Why, what other enormities is he in the habit of committing?"



"A vast number ; many—far too many for enumeration ; and therefore I shall pass the minors over in silence, and content myself with pointing out what doubtless you have all noticed long ago."

"To be sure, Rhoda, you mean that hatefully contemptible habit he has of talking *at* people."

"I do, Margaret ; you are right ; and did you ever hear any one indulge in the paltry, pitiful, offensive, shabby, detestable practice, to the extent that disagreeable man does ?

"I declare I have often felt as if I could fly at the spiteful creature, when he has been going on in the way he does, and box his ears soundly. If there is a thing that I absolutely, wholly, entirely, sincerely detest, it is to hear a person being *talked at*. Oh ! how I *do* hate it ; 'tis such a cowardly, meanspirited mode of attack.

"Those who indulge in that most vile propensity, take especial care their victim shall fully understand the charges brought forward are purposely directed at them ; yet, should the accused presume to refute these same charges, and convict the speaker of malice, he can always take refuge from the justly excited indignation of his foe, by declaring he had only been making general remarks, but if people will be conceited enough to imagine themselves of sufficient importance to be made subject-matter for everybody's thoughts and conversation, why, it was hardly fair to call him to account, when really, so far from intending anything, he had scarcely noticed who was present and who was absent, so of course could not be addressing a person that he didn't even know was in the room."

"Upon my word, Rhoda," laughed Margaret, "you have hit off Captain Peter to a nicety ; that is exactly the way he talks."

"Yes ; and the sooner he leaves such inglorious warfare off the more to his own credit, and better for his friends."

"Friends ! why surely, Rhoda, you don't imagine such a man as that has any *friends* ?"

"He would be badly off, truly, if he hadn't."

"I'm sure he don't deserve so great a blessing as a friend."

"Friends, real, true friends, are blessings indeed," said Esther, rising and putting aside a book she had been vainly attempting to read for the last half hour, "and happy are those who have even *one*."

"I don't think there is any human being breathing so utterly bad as not to possess some one whom they could call friend," observed Martha.

"It does not necessarily follow that a person must be *bad*, because they cannot boast of friends, Martha."

"Ah ! nonsense ; everybody can get plenty of friends if they like, and if they can't it is all their own faults ; it is only those who are very proud or very disagreeable who need ever complain about want of cronies."

"If you mean *friends* when you speak of *cronies*, Charlotte, I cannot at all agree with you ; a man may have dozens of cronies, and hundreds of *acquaintances*, but not one *friend*."

"Oh ! I don't believe there *is* such a thing as what people call *friendship*, even among *men* ; and when I hear a parcel of women talking about the delights of *female friendship*, I declare it makes me feel quite disgusted. It is such perfect rubbish to suppose one woman would care a brass farthing about another, unless, indeed, there chanced to be some handsome brother, son, or cousin, in the way, and then I grant

you women may feel an immensity of affection for each other; but to fancy that any one with a grain of sense in their head could be such a gull as to suppose that two women really loved each other *disinterestedly*, is what I can't, don't, and won't believe."

"I differ from you there, Charlotte," said Esther, who at that moment re-entered the room in search of something she had forgotten, equipped for her morning walk,—“I differ from you there, Charlotte, I think, nay, I *know*, there *is* such a thing as female friendship, strong, firm, and lasting."

"Indeed!" said Charlotte, sarcastically, as Esther closed the door, "indeed! and I suppose you would have us imagine you are a living proof! By the way, Margaret, do try and persuade Esther to leave off that hideous old guy of a bonnet she will persist in wearing; I declare Captain Murray did nothing but stare at her all service-time, last Sunday. I dare say he made fine fun about her with that proud sister of his, when they got home."

"It don't strike me that Captain Murray looks at Esther for the purpose of criticising her bonnet," said Margaret, significantly, "and however you can call the lovely, affable, Bertha Murray *proud*, is to me perfectly inexplicable."

"La! what stuff, Margaret. I suppose you would have us believe the handsome Augustus had fallen in love with Esther!" said Martha, laughing. "His must be an odd taste indeed, to admire such a dowdy as she is, poor girl."

"Why, do you think that when a man's attention is attracted towards a woman, it is because her gown is well made, or her bonnet of the most approved fashion?"

"In many instances, I think dress goes a great

way. I'm sure if I were a man, I could never give a second look at a woman muffled up in the frumpish manner our Esther is ; I declare when I met her coming down the street yesterday, I thought she looked quite disgraceful, and I'm sure I felt perfectly ashamed of her."

"Well, I cannot understand how that can be possible, for to my thinking she's always particularly neat ; and I'm sure in the house there is not one of us dresses half so well or becomingly as she does ; so when you talk about being *ashamed* of her, Charlotte, you must either be joking or saying what you don't mean, I'm certain."

"I quite agree with you, Rhoda, and I'm sure it can be nothing but prejudice that makes Charlotte and Martha find such fault with Esther. Did they but see her with *my* eyes, they would neither call her dowdy nor ugly."

"Well, well, dear Margaret," replied Charlotte, affectionately, "do not let us quarrel about Esther, and I'm sure I would not wish you to think less well of her than you do. She shall be the glass of fashion, and the mould of form, the observed of all beholders, the cynosure of all eyes, if it pleaseth you, or anything else you like ; and believe me, if she would not make herself so very disagreeable, or, I should rather say, if she was not quite so self-opinionated, I might try and like her too ; but I always did detest people who think much of themselves, and always shall."

"So do I, Charlotte ; but I feel convinced that it is the height of injustice to accuse Esther of either one or the other ; in my opinion she would be far happier did she possess a little more of both."

"Now, that's too ridiculous, Margaret. I sup-

pose you would have us believe Esther don't think herself very clever?"

"I am convinced she don't; and it would be better for her if she did."

"Well, then, of course all argument upon the subject must be at an end, for it is quite clear we should never agree in our opinion of her, were we to discuss the matter till doomsday. My notion is, that she has an overweening share of self-conceit and pride, while you imagine her to be deficient in both."

"I side with Margaret, because I am convinced she has taken the right view of Esther's character," said Rhoda.

"And I with Charlotte," replied Martha; "for am certain hers is the most correct judgment of the two."

"What do *you* say, Botherem?" asked Margaret of the poet, who at that moment rose from his usual recumbent position on the sofa, and stood staring about him, as if just awakened out of some deeply absorbing reverie.

"To what, Margaret?"

"Why, do you think Esther has too *much* vanity or too *little*?"

"She don't think half enough of herself; in my opinion of her is, that she has more brains than the whole four of you put together."

"Well said, Botherem," cried Margaret and Rhoda in the same breath; "well and truly said."

Charlotte and Martha laughed; but whether the laugh was one of scorn or of approval would be difficult to decide.

"Let me give you a small piece of advice, fair and dear sisters mine. Charlotte, and thou, sweet Martha, you are both warm-hearted, affectionate

kind, obliging girls, and yet you work hard to make people fancy you are precisely the reverse, by continually speaking ill of one who deserves it not,—love Esther, and she will love you. Adieu, fare thee well, beloved sisters, fare thee all well;—heed my injunctions.”

“Botherem is right,” said Rhoda, as the poet departed.

“Quite,” replied Margaret.

“I wish I could think so,” observed Martha.

“I’ll do my best to follow his advice,” thought Charlotte,—and she did.

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## CHAPTER VI.

“Good morning, Miss Banks,” said a rich, deep voice, close to the ear of Esther, as she sat resting herself on a stile that divided her mother’s meadow from the village lane. “Good morning! a splendid day for a ramble; which way are you bending your steps?”

“I am not bending my steps either way at this precise moment, Captain Murray,” replied Esther, smiling, “as you may perceive; but if you ask me which way I intend going, I answer, down the village.”

“Thank you for setting me right; but if it is not an affair of business that calls you there, can you not defer it till another time. I have something to say, or, more properly speaking, a favour to beg, which, though I know you are too sensible and kind-hearted either to feel offended at my asking, or refuse complying with, as far as lies in your

power, yet it is a matter upon which I hardly like touching."

"Then let me do it for you; it will save trouble on both sides; the sooner a disagreeable affair is ended the better, and as I am perfectly aware what the subject of your request would be, I will not put you to the unpleasant necessity of uttering harsh truths, none the more pleasing for being interlarded with a few fine speeches; such things please me not."

"I believe you; from my heart, I believe you, Miss Banks!" cried Augustus, enthusiastically, "a mind like yours is not easily won by flattery and ——"

"Hold, hold! you seem to think it is, or you would not make such a remark. What you can possibly know about the capabilities of my understanding is rather puzzling. If I remember rightly, this is absolutely but the third time we have ever spoken to each other, and to the best of my recollection, what passed in conversation upon those two former occasions, was certainly anything but profound or edifying; however, as that is not the matter in discussion, or rather, I should say, need not be, we will turn to the subject about which I am indebted to Captain Murray for his present very polite attentions." This was said, accompanied by a slight heightening of complexion, and a somewhat stiff inclination of the speaker's head.

"Nay, nay; be not angry with me, Miss Banks, or you will put all my courage and resolution to flight. I feel half ashamed of myself as it is, and another such look would send me back with my petition unpleaded."

"Where our motive is good, we should not fear repulse, even when we know such will be result of

our application ; but I am not aware I have given you reason to suppose such would be the fate of your request ;—quite the contrary ; and to shew you I am as anxious as yourself to put a termination to what has been an unfailing source of vexation and *humiliation*, for many months past, to me, as well as others, I will save you the trouble, as I before observed, of putting your thoughts into fine speeches and well rounded periods, by making a plain statement, which plain statement amounts to neither more nor less than this : ‘ Miss Esther Banks, you will oblige me, and confer a great favour upon my sister, by using what influence you possess over your brother Botherem, in prevailing upon him to discontinue his very absurd and intrusive attentions to her, and at the same time hint it might be as well, were he to leave off writing poetry, and employ himself about some rational occupation—If he can ! ’ ”

“ Upon my word, were it not that I feel rather abashed at hearing my own thoughts, and *such* thoughts, (for it would be but want of candour in me, should I attempt to deny the correctness with which you have laid bare my sentiments,) from the lips of another, I could smile at your droll and pithy way of explaining what would have taken me half an hour to do, and then not do so well ! But, indeed, my dear Miss Banks, I owe you some apology for thus thrusting myself, and —— ”

“ No apology, Captain Murray ; do not apologize, I beg of you ; that I have felt deeply vexed and grieved at the false notions my poor brother has so unhappily taken into his head I will not attempt to disown, and if there is any apology needed it would be on our side. I assure you it was with no concurrence of mine, that our family sought the



acquaintance of yours. I was obliged to Miss Murray for her kind attentions to me upon my return home, but I soon discovered the strange hallucination under which my poor brother laboured, and at the risk of being viewed in the light of a cold, repulsive, disagreeable, and I may add, ungrateful person, by your sweet sister, I have steadily refused all her offers of kindness and friendship, not, believe me, without many a bitter feeling of disappointment and regret, for surely never lived a creature so formed to inspire love and affection as Bertha Murray; but, I beg your pardon," continued she, colouring to the temples, as she caught the eyes of Augustus Murray fixed in admiring wonder upon her varying countenance,—“I beg your pardon, I fear I am allowing my feelings to master my better judgment, and have said more, much more, than I intended, or indeed ought.”

“Go on, go on,” said her hearer, in a low sweet voice; “I could listen to you for ever.”

“What I can do to protect Miss Murray from further molestation,” replied Esther, endeavouring, though with difficulty, (for the speaking eyes of Augustus were still fixed upon her,) to recover the usually cold and almost haughty manner which led strangers to suppose her far other than she was, “I will, though I cannot promise much. There is but one way,” and Esther smiled a meaning smile, “there is but one way I know of to put an end to all this vexatious folly; it is the only thing, I feel convinced, that can effectually rid her of his ceaseless persecutions; but,” continued she, half aloud, and half speaking to herself, “how could a creature like Bertha Murray consent ——”

“To anything *you* would ask, except wedding your brother,” said Captain Murray, with marked

emphasis, "there is no request she would refuse complying with if made by you, I am certain. Did you but know how anxious she is to gain your friendship and good opinion, you would not so uniformly refuse all her overtures."

"I give Miss Murray full credit for everything that is kind and generous, though surely she cannot but be aware of the motive that induces me to refuse those offers. Think you," resumed Esther, after a momentary pause,—“think you, Captain Murray, despite my seeming rudeness, your sister would consent to receive me for a few minutes? I have something to say, something I had rather say to *her* than to *you*. I see no other method by which all this discomfort can be stopped,—none;” and Esther again fell into a reverie.

"No; it must be done," said she, after a pause, "painful and distressing as such a scene would be to Miss Murray, and strange as doubtless she will think me in proposing so extraordinary a mode of proceeding, I *must* run the risk; there is no other course left, if his folly is to be silenced at once and for ever. When do you think your sister would consent to receive me?" continued she, addressing Captain Murray, for the first part of her argument had been spoken to herself rather than to Augustus.

"Your time shall be hers," replied he; "only say when you can make it convenient to come, and I am sure my sister will be delighted at receiving a visitor she has so long and anxiously expected; tell me, when shall it be?"

"To-morrow, at three o'clock, then; but will you be kind enough to say, I should feel much obliged by being shewn immediately to her own boudoir, as I shall feel in no humour to play the agreeable *en route*. It is not a pleasant mission I come

upon, and I must screw my courage to its height ere I find resolution sufficient to enable me to play the part I have undertaken. I am not fond of presenting petitions under any circumstances—such things by no means suit my temper and disposition; but as this will benefit the petitioned as well as the petitioner, why, for once my scruples must give way, and my pride feel satisfied.”

“Indeed! well, I ask no questions, though, if truth be told, I am somewhat curious; however, I feel convinced that whatever plan you pursue must be for the best, and so I will call patience to my aid, nor seek for confidence where it is denied.”

“Will you promise Miss Murray shall be quite *alone* when I come.”

“*Quite alone!* What, am I to be banished, house, and grounds, and all? May I not be in the doorway even, to say, How fares it with you this fine day?”

“I care not where you are, so I am permitted to see your *sister* alone; mind, I insist upon that, for if not, I shall come away with my tale untold.”

“I will do my endeavour to obey you, though I must own 'tis rather hard, that I, who have been the means of at last bringing about this long wished-for visit must be wholly and entirely excluded from the pleasure it will afford.”

“Nay, nay; it will afford no pleasure—*none*; quite the reverse. I would it could be avoided, but when I see what my duty is, I never turn aside, let the consequences be as they may; and now, Captain Murray, our conference being ended, I must wish you good morning.”

“Will you not allow me the happiness of seeing

you home, Miss Banks ? Surely you cannot be cruel enough to dismiss me in this way."

"I have no intention of being either cruel or uncivil, Captain Murray," replied Esther, with a cold smile—"neither do I imagine you look upon my refusal of your services in that light; and as I have a visit of charity to make, I should prefer being alone."

"Be it as you will, fair lady ; I would not for all the world cause you annoyance or inconvenience—no, not for a single moment ; but, I trust when next we meet, I shall have found more favour in your sight than to be thus said Nay unto. *Must I go?*" continued he, still lingering, and looking very much as if he meant to stay. "Are you resolved I shall not accompany you ? Indeed, this is really unkind."

"Good morning, Captain Murray ; I dislike compliments, and am in no humour for banter, so the sooner both are ended the better. You will deliver my message to your sister," saying which, she bowed stiffly, and commenced her walk towards the village.

"Humph !" said Augustus Murray, as he stood watching the graceful form of Esther Banks, while she slowly wound her way through the beautiful meadow that lay before him ;—"humph, you are a strange being ; I can't make you out ; and yet I'd bet Macbeth to yon tailless cur, there's better brains and more heart in you, than half the fair dames of my acquaintance. That woman is a perfect riddle," continued he, still talking to himself ; "I wonder if she has ever been in love ! Ah, I've hit it ! What else could make her so cold and stiff one moment, and then blaze out all fire and feeling the next ?

It would be something worth trying for, to make such a woman as that fall over head and ears in love with one ; but I am too late in the field, I fear. Let me consider," pursued he, throwing himself on the grass, " love ! yes, she must be in love, that's certain, but with whom ? Not *me*, that's also certain ; *I* never had any of those sweet smiles bestowed upon me,—for sweet they are, only a little too sad. I wish I were not going away just yet. How stupid I must have been, so often as we used to meet, never to have thought about falling in love with her before. Did ever mortal behold such a set of teeth ! and lips ! Such lips ! why, her mouth is absolutely perfect. I should like to know if her heart is free. Well, well, I'll consult Bertha about it ; women are a deuced deal more clear-sighted in such matters than men. I could almost slay that numscull brother of hers, for causing the poor girl so much anxiety as it is evident to see he does. Why, in the name of patience, did I not think about all this long ago ? How she coloured when she caught me looking at her. I'm afraid she must set me down for a monstrously ill-bred animal. She's a noble creature,—*that* she is. Had we never met, or had we never parted, say I ! Come along, Macbeth !" cried he, starting up, and whistling to his dog. " I hope I am not caught at last ; I begin to have some misgivings about the matter. Well, come along, Mackie ;" so saying, he bounded over the stile, and turned his steps in the direction of Darcey Hall.

## CHAPTER VII.

"I DON'T know what the deuce people mean by calling Esther Banks plain, for to my taste she has the finest expression of countenance I almost ever beheld," exclaimed Augustus Murray, bursting into his sister's very beautiful little sitting-room. "I declare to you, Bertha, that once or twice, while I was talking to her this morning, I caught myself gazing at her with a feeling of delight I can hardly account for. Beauty certainly is a beautiful thing; but the loveliest face without *expression*—yes, the *very* loveliest, and I have seen many such in my travels—could no more match the countenance of Esther Banks, as the various thoughts and feelings passed through her heart and head, stamping themselves on her changing features, than I might match Apollo!"

Bertha smiled.

"Ah! you may laugh as you will, fair sister, but upon my soul, as she stood with her graceful figure resting against an arm of the old oak, while her varying colour and fine eyes told too plainly what was passing within, I thought I had never beheld so perfectly loveable a creature! I would to Heaven——"

"Why Augustus, dear Augustus! what *are* you talking about?" said Bertha, laughing—"you are certainly beside yourself—you are raving—positively raving!"

"No, no; well, yes, it does appear something like it, I confess; but really I can think of nothing else; I can't get her animated look, while she

was talking about you, out of my head, if I would. The idea, the bare idea, of calling such a woman as that *ugly*. I vow I feel quite Quixotic, and ready to do battle upon all or any who shall dare to affirm that Esther Banks is aught but absolute perfection!"

"I fear me much, then, brother mine, if you have not to challenge the *all*, you will the *many*; for though it must be owned I have not seen her to the best advantage, (no woman *is* so seen, when walking alone, wrapped up in a large shawl, with a close bonnet, and a veil drawn over her face,) yet what little I have had an opportunity of observing, certainly would lead me to give a more sober description of her personal graces! Not but that I am ready enough to admit, she must be a very superior person; for if only one half of those praises bestowed upon her by the Bedfords be deserved, I am sure I should love her. You know it was at their earnest desire that I have so perseveringly endeavoured to win her friendship; and really I cannot quite reconcile it with my own feelings, or at least my ideas of what is amiable, that she should so uniformly, sternly, and I may say, ungraciously, have repulsed all my advances."

"No, you cannot understand it till you know her, and see through the motives that prompted her to act as she has done. I believe, firmly, you do not wish for her friendship more earnestly than she does for yours. I am convinced it is solely on your account, to save you as much as possible from the persecutions of her idiot brother, that she refuses our acquaintance; for, tormenting as he is, the case had proved a thousand times worse could he but have made her visits here a cover for his intrusions."

"And do you really think that has been her motive?—The *only* one?"

"I do not *think*; I *know*—at least, if I may judge from her own words."

"She told you so herself?"

"She said half, and looked the rest; but I have a piece of intelligence I am sure will please you; however, let me begin at the beginning, or I fear you will set me down for little wiser than the oaf, about whom I have taken all this trouble, for thy dear sake, fair maiden."

"Trouble! I should have guessed you were more than repaid, let the undertaking be what it might, by your own account."

"I'm not so sure of that," replied Augustus, laughing; "I have an indistinct notion my troubles are but just begun. Do you think Esther Banks is in love?"

"Why, Augustus, are you not ashamed of yourself to rattle on in that way. What has Esther Banks being or not being in love, to do with you?"

"Ha, ha, we appear to be both in one mind; I am working hard to beat off your sweetheart, and you are kindly endeavouring to perform the like good office for me. Well, well, I don't think yours would be quite so Herculean a labour as mine. My Daphne retreats, your Apollo advances—my love flies me, your adorer pursues—and with such rapid strides, one had need of Jack's seven-league-boots to keep up with him. But, come, guess what I have to tell? Can't you?"

"Why, really I do feel a little mystified, I must candidly own, for I cannot very readily see——"

"Yes, but *I* can; and so I pray thee give ear to what I have to say.



"I told you I had taken it into my sapient head, that the only way to get rid of your ardent and persevering adorer, would be by enlisting his sister into our service, for I felt convinced, from the few opportunities I have had of observing, that she was as much disgusted—nay, more than ourselves—by Botherem's proceedings. Vexation must mingle largely with the mortification and annoyance she endures on his account; for, though to us the thing is doubtless exceedingly disagreeable, yet we have a counterbalance in the amusement derived from the poor numscull's fooleries. But with her, matters are widely different. She is keenly alive to the absurd positions in which he places himself; and if I am not egregiously out, suffers more—much more—than she would care to own.

"It is clearly evident that Esther Banks is both a proud and sensitive woman, and the idea of any one so nearly connected with her as a brother, making himself the laughing-stock of all who know him, is rather more than she can patiently endure."

"You are perfectly right there, Augustus, for I have watched with painful anxiety the look of almost terror she fixes on Botherem, as he rushes, with such indecent haste, scarcely waiting for the finishing prayer to be ended, from their pew, to ours, every Sunday; and really it is distressing to see how agitated she gets, evidently suffering more by the endeavours she makes to conceal her mortification, as the poor creature stands bowing, and making all sorts of ludicrously absurd grimaces, until we have fairly left the church.

"It must be very trying, I am sure I could not stand what she has to put up with from his egregious folly."

"No, certainly; and it is worse for her than the other sisters. They have been so accustomed to his strange vagaries, and outrageous ways from childhood, that I doubt if they are hardly aware how great a fool the fellow is."

"Exactly. Nor do I think they are capable of feeling, as keenly as Esther does, those monstrous extravagances he is continually committing, and so long as he does not interfere with their love-makings, they won't trouble their heads about his. I wish an end could be put to his folly for *her* sake; but still, dear Augustus, I do not see in what way she can be of use in this matter.

"As far as talking to him goes, for the purpose of persuading him to relinquish his present 'devoted attachment,' as he calls these wild vagaries he indulges in, why, I fancy she might just as well request the sun-dial there, to walk into the next field, and expect it would comply, because she asked it so to do. No, believe me, it will be wholly useless, and only make a bad matter worse."

"Excuse me, I differ from you *in toto*; but still I have not told you how I came to be the bearer of this piece of intelligence I have to communicate."

"Well, you must know it so chanced that, as I was taking my morning ramble, I fell in with Esther Banks; so, plucking up all the impudence I am possessed of, I made bold to tell her I had a favour to ask, which I must leave to the wisdom of her head and kindness of her heart, to grant, or not, as seemed good unto her. Now, you know, nine women out of ten would have blushed, and stammered, and had recourse to sundry pretty, would-be-attractive ways on hearing such an avowal from so respectable an individual as myself. Not so did Esther Banks. After surveying me with a steady,

calm, quiet look, she replied—*assuming* the utmost composure—I say *assuming*, for it strikes me her lips don't always tell the language of her heart—‘I know perfectly well what you would say, Captain Murray, and as far as lies in my power I promise to grant your request, which is neither more nor less than this: Miss Banks, try and persuade your unfortunate brother to be a little more rational, and a little less troublesome. Keep him from intruding on my sister, and prevail upon him to employ himself about something more useful than writing bad rhymes.’”

“Dear Augustus, I doubt if this is exactly fair. I think it is taking an undue advantage of Miss Banks’ sensitiveness upon that point.”

“Why, in honest truth I had some rather disagreeable misgivings touching the matter myself; but really, the moment I began to talk, she appeared so perfectly ready and willing to comprehend and relieve me from as much of the unpleasant detail as possible, that I had no time to back out, even supposing I had wished it.”

“Well; but what did she say about coming here?”

“Say! Why just this: that she had something to communicate, which must be told to you, and you alone, and if any one else—meaning *me*, I suppose—should presume to be present, she would return with her tale untold.”

“How odd,” said Bertha, looking extremely puzzled; “I wonder what it can possibly be.”

“Why, of course, something connected with Bertha, Botherem, and love,” replied Augustus, laughing. “Haven’t you a cupboard you could pop me into?” continued he, walking round the room, and lifting up the curtains; “I should monstrously

like to be present at your conference. I remember once entering the drawing-room at Bedford's sooner after dinner than was my usual custom, when we were both staying there ; for, as I told you before, the moment I made my appearance, she invariably left off speaking ; and, as I knew she was the life and soul of the women's party, when they gathered round the fire, between dinner and coffee, I seldom came up stairs till almost all had left the dining-room, because I would not curtail them of their pleasant chit-chat— Well, as I was going to tell you, upon this particular occasion, having a most tormentingly stunning headache, and there being a much larger party than usual, and consequently a greater quantity of wine and noise going about than accorded with my temperament at the time, I left, almost immediately the ladies retired, and entered the drawing-room, while one of their *coterie* was telling a merry tale, and consequently all laughing heartily, so I was neither heard nor observed. Well, when this said merry tale was ended, some graver subject came on the *tapis*, and Esther Banks took a large share in the conversation. One of the party was very severely censuring a person for what she called his extravagant charity. Miss Banks took up the cause of the absent delinquent, and nobly did she defend him. Surely never did woman speak so well—nay, so beautifully ! Such sound sense and capital argument I never heard from female lips before. She must be a clever, clear-headed girl, and I must say it would afford me a high treat, could I be present while she pleads her 'petition,' as she calls it."

"How long were you both staying together at Bedford?" said Bertha.

"Oh, a month and more ! She was passing the

whole winter with them. It was at the time my last ship fitted out, and as they would not even hear of my taking up my quarters at an hotel, I stayed there, you know, from the time I left home, until we sailed, which I should say was nearer six weeks than a month."

"And in all that time did you never attempt to play the agreeable to Miss Banks?"

"No; for whenever I made anything like an advance, or attempted to draw her into conversation, she invariably put on such a stiff and distant manner, that I naturally concluded I was no favourite; and so after the first week, or thereabouts, we used to meet with a 'good morning,' and part with a 'good evening,' but beyond this, I really don't think the slightest degree of courtesy or civility passed between us, the whole time I remained at Blacklands."

"Might you not have been as much in fault as she was?"

"I really begin to fear such must be the view she took of the case, and I'm only sorry now I should have been such a fool as to allow anything like resentment to master my better feelings, though, of a truth, she did pique my pride, and wound my vanity not a little, by her indifferent manner towards me. I might as well have been a stock or a stone, for aught she seemed to care about me; and, excepting that extraordinary habit she got into, of ceasing to speak the moment I entered the room, one would have been led to suppose she viewed me in the light of a perfect nonentity, or something worse."

"And you really think she *dislikes* you, Augustus?"

"Why, what else should I think? I've often

looked at her while she has been reading, and directly I joined in the conversation, she would sit with her eyes fixed upon the same page, biting her lips, and frowning very much, as if she could beat me for interrupting her studies, nor would she turn a leaf till I had done speaking."

"And, of course, wishing you far away all this time," said Bertha, smiling.

"So I should imagine. I am rather at a loss what other construction to put upon her strange manner, if it did not proceed from aversion."

"We do not all judge alike in such matters, Augustus. My conclusions and yours, I fancy, are travelling very different roads. I am glad it is so," continued she, with something that sounded very like a sigh, "for——"

"For what, Bertha? What makes you look so grave?"

"Nothing, Augustus—nothing. It was only a whim entered my sapient head at the moment. And so you really think Miss Banks *dislikes* you?"

"Most undoubtedly I *do*."

"And do you *dislike* her?"

"Most undoubtedly I *do not*."

"I am glad to hear that, at all events. The antipathy is on the right side, most assuredly. Men much sooner forget their *likings* than their *dislikings*, and women *au contraire*."

"Not always."

"Pardon me, dear brother, for contradicting you, but I repeat *always*."

"Well, you shall have it your own way, Bertha; I won't quarrel with you about a matter of opinion, but I think differently."

"When did you say Miss Banks would come to the Hall? To-morrow?"

"Yes, at three o'clock. So, mind you are at home; and mind also, no one is with you—not even our mother. I promised her faithfully it should be so, and don't you make me worse than my word."

"Rest perfectly satisfied about that, Augustus. I have too long wished to get an opportunity of seeing Esther Banks as she really is, to run the risk of offending her, which I suppose would inevitably be the case, were her injunctions disregarded."

"Can't you manage to put in a good word for me, Bertha?" said her brother, in a tone that sounded by no means as if the speaker was *jesting*. "I'd give something to gain her good opinion—that I would."

"What! Am I to ask her if she will be kind enough to fall in love with you, Augustus?"

"I wish she would. I really believe I'm more than half caught myself."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Bertha, "'tis doubtless a most distressing case, but one day upon the broad sea will set your heart at ease again."

"I am not so sure of that," replied he, shaking his head; "but, come, I must be off. I promised Mr. Darcey I would assist him with my valuable advice about some improvements he intends making in the shrubbery, and I fear I have kept him waiting."

"Dear Augustus, I shall be *so* sorry when you are gone. Mr. Darcey is not like the same person while you are at home. I fear he will miss you now more than ever—everything is so different when you are at sea. Poor man, your society is a great relief to him—very great. It was more than unkind of you to ask for a ship so soon after coming home."

"Why, Bertha, how can you talk in that way? Would you wish me to mar my own prospects, and stay kicking my heels here, when I have been treated so handsomely by the Lords High? No, no; that would never do. I certainly do feel less disposed to leave home now than I ever did before. But you know when honour calls, etc. etc.; so give me a kiss, and don't try to make me discontented with my lot, if you love me. Good-bye, fair sister, till six o'clock."

"Good-bye, dear Augustus."

"Don't forget what I have told you about to-morrow," said he, returning when he had got halfway down stairs—"be sure you don't!"

"Do not doubt me, Augustus. I am not very likely to forget, depend upon it."

"No, I hope so," saying which, he again retreated from the apartment, and went in search of Mr. Darcey.

Had Augustus Murray been remarkably little, particularly ugly, and exceedingly disagreeable,—with sand-coloured hair, and ruby-tinted visage, an expansive mouth, and diminutive eyes,—he would have been at no loss to account for the singularity of Esther Banks' *éloigné* manner towards himself; because such an one, being invariably possessed of, and blessed with, a superabundant stock of vanity and self-conceit, he would instantaneously ascribe any alteration in her usual demeanour, when under the influence of his presence, as arising from deep-rooted love, silent, and absorbing, caused by the intense admiration his great beauty had inspired. But, as Augustus Murray was neither little, ugly, disagreeable, vain, nor conceited, it never entered his noble, generous mind for an instant, to imagine, that the first few days



Esther Banks had been in his fascinating company was quite sufficient to stamp his image on her heart for ever; and that she, poor girl, seeing, or fancying she saw, how utterly hopeless must be the indulgence of such a passion, had endeavoured to root it out, ere it should take too mighty a hold upon her. But, alas! though the effort was made with all the determination her strong mind could be capable of, it proved utterly, entirely unavailing. The more she tried, so much more strongly, firmly, did it fix. Esther Banks knew she was not beautiful, and, unfortunately for herself, she undervalued what attractions she did possess, or rather, it should be said, was wholly unconscious of possessing any, nor was it until she first beheld Augustus Murray, that she ever thought of attaching that importance to beauty she afterwards so bitterly bewailed the want of. "Oh," would she think, when looking at some lovely and beloved object, "Oh, that it had pleased Heaven to have formed me like her. Then might I have hoped for some return of my wasted affections! Oh, never did I wish for beauty till now! But the one is as hopeless as the other. I cannot doubt his dislike to me—it almost amounts to aversion! Would I had never beheld him!"

Alas, for poor Esther! Her musings were sad and bitter. She would not have imparted the grief that preyed upon her, had there been any in whom she could confide. And when she returned home, how doubly bitter were those feelings rendered by the humiliating folly of her witless brother. Poor girl! she bore it bravely though her heart was breaking!

## CHAPTER VIII.

"Miss Banks," said a servant, throwing open the door of Bertha Murray's very elegant little boudoir, "Miss Banks, ma'am."

"My dear Miss Banks, I am so delighted to see you," said Bertha, eagerly, advancing to meet her visitor; "this is indeed a pleasure, one I have so long wished for, but had begun to fear would never be realized. I am really most happy you have consented to visit me at last."

"I feel obliged by your kindness," replied Esther, returning the warm pressure of Bertha's hand—"kindness I neither expected nor deserved after the chilling, and almost rude manner in which I have so often repelled what, under other circumstances, would have been most gratefully accepted,—your proffered friendship. But I do not come to talk of myself, and, perhaps, were you aware of the intent of my mission, would scarcely receive me in the way you do."

"My dear Miss Banks, 'time is plenty,' so let us have a little pleasant chat before proceeding to what you appear to think I shall consider a somewhat disagreeable business, and surely the further such things are off the better; but if it will save you ever so small a portion of the unpleasantness your manner would lead me to imagine the communication you have to make will cause you, I must be honest enough to own I can more than guess at the subject, though not exactly the point of your argument, for I suppose I shall be called upon to take share in the discussion. I hope and trust you will not be very exacting," continued she,

as a slight and almost imperceptible blush passed over her fair face, and a sweet, though meaning smile curled the corners of her beautiful mouth.

"That I have come on a most disagreeable errand, I need hardly say, as I can gather from what you remark that you are not utterly a stranger to the motive which led me to seek this interview, and you will, I am sure, agree with me, that the sooner a conversation so painful as this must unavoidably prove, on both sides, is ended, the better will it be for all parties," replied Esther in a grave and decided tone.

"Well, my dear Miss Banks, be it as you will, —I am all attention."

"The reason for my having intruded——"

"Oh, no, no! pray do not make use of such a word—say rather conferring the favour."

"We will not quarrel about mere modes of expression, Miss Murray; but when you have heard what I intend proposing, I doubt much if you can look upon my present visit in any other light than that of an intrusion. I come to speak of my poor brother Botherem; have you patience to listen?"

"Yes, to all and everything you may think fit to propose or advise; speak out boldly, my dear Miss Banks, and I will be guided by your counsel, for I am certain whatever you judge best to be done, *will* be best."

"Do not be *too* certain, Miss Murray; I shall put your resolution to a strong test."

"Never mind; I dare say it will be nothing so very, very terrible," replied Bertha, smiling.

"You will do as I request?"

"I will, to the letter."

"Then you must allow my brother Botherem to make you an offer of his hand and heart."

"*What !*" said Bertha, starting up and drawing her beautiful figure to its full height ; "surely, Miss Banks, this would be rather a peculiar—nay, almost a cruel course to pursue towards your brother, for you must be well aware how utterly absurd such—"

"I am fully aware how more than absurd such a request appears, but you have promised to be guided by my advice, and I hold you to your word."

"And it shall not be forfeited," replied Bertha, re-seating herself, "but I own I was taken by surprise ; you would thus have felt yourself, had so extraordinary a request been made under existing circumstances."

"Probably I might."

"But I cannot see how such a course as you propose would end—forgive me, my dear Miss Banks, for making use of so harsh an expression towards one so nearly connected with yourself as Mr. Banks—the annoyance I have endured from his attentions for many months past."

"In this way ; give him an opportunity of proposing, and the answer he must necessarily receive will cause him to fancy nothing but death can end his woes."

"For mercy sake," exclaimed Bertha, "you do not——"

"Have no fears on his account, Miss Murray ; I know him too well to entertain anything like serious apprehension that danger might ensue."

"But supposing the poor young man should take the matter really to heart, for I do believe he *fancies* himself in love."

"Yes, that he *fancies* himself in love there can be little doubt, and with any other temperament

than his it would be rather more than fancy," replied Esther, as she gazed in undisguised admiration on the lovely being before her. "A sad, sad *reality*, if it must end, as this will, in scornful rejection;" the last part of the sentence was rather thought than spoken. "Will you consent to my plan?" continued she, suddenly looking up at Bertha—"yes or no?"

"Yes."

"I thank you as much for your own sake as ours, or I should rather say mine. I fear I am the only one of his family who sees the matter in its true light, and vexatious enough it is, believe me, Miss Murray."

"I do believe you most sincerely, for however unpleasant the course your brother has thought fit to adopt towards me is, and always has been, yet I feel convinced you have had your full share of the annoyance and mortification his strange conduct must necessarily produce, but still I really doubt that what you propose would have the desired effect. Do you feel sure no unpleasant results will follow?"

"Certainly I do, quite convinced."

"But I fear——"

"I entreat of you, Miss Murray, not to allow one uneasy thought about consequences to deter you from the only course by which an end can be put to all this folly, for though I have always looked upon his presumptuous hopes with feelings I can hardly describe, yet never till this moment did I see the monstrous absurdity of such pretensions. It is exceedingly painful to be compelled to acknowledge the inferiority of our own relatives, but the mind of my poor brother is so very weak, that he seldom sees things in their right point of view,

and he can never be made to understand how utterly hopeless must be what he calls his exalted love and devoted attachment to you, until he receives a positive denial of his suit from your own lips. For myself, I find all *argument* with him upon the subject worse than waste of words, every attempt I make to reason with him only serves to strengthen his self-delusion. His boast is, that love such as he feels would be nothing without hope, and I believe it has never entered his head for a moment that you can be insensible to the refinement of his affection, and the beauty of his rhymes. He would hope on till his life ended, and were it only in sheer pity to *him*, setting aside all other considerations, I entreat you to grant my request."

"But how is it to be managed? for, strange as it may appear, though unceasing in his attentions, he has never, in the most remote way, alluded to——"

"No, perhaps you don't so well understand his motives as I do; he has a thousand fantastic notions in his poor brain about the delights of hope, the pleasant season of love, the blessings of having an inspiring theme, and so forth; now as long as he can dwell upon all this he is happy, and ludicrous as it must seem to you, Miss Murray, my firm conviction is, that he entertains no fears for the result; he imagines he has only to ask, and be accepted."

"Nonsense!" laughed Bertha, wholly unable to repress the mirth caused by so monstrous an idea. — "you are surely joking, Miss Banks!"

"Indeed I am *not*, that it is a matter quite settled in his own mind I entertain not the slightest doubt, and hence my motive for making so singular a request as I have just done."

"And you really think, that should I consent to afford him an opportunity of declaring his—his—what would he call it?—preference for me, the answer I must give would be the means of saving us both (for it requires little penetration to discover you are as much a sufferer by his persevering folly as myself) from further annoyance? Do you feel *certain* such would be the result?"

"I do, I do; and most grateful am I for your kindness," replied Esther, all the warmth of her truly affectionate nature bursting forth from the shroud of seeming coldness and indifference, under which she usually disguised feelings often too intense and enthusiastic to be understood by those around her—"I do, and may Heaven bless you for it; this will be one source of grief removed. Oh, could all others be as easily lightened. Sweet girl, I thank you."

Bertha looked at the flushed features of her companion in surprise, totally at a loss to account for the evidently painful agitation under which she was suffering. "Surely," thought she, "the simple act of consenting to put an end to the silly fooleries of her half-witted brother could never have power to excite her thus; she who is usually so cold and collected in her manner,—what can be the meaning of it? Augustus was right when he said her feelings were warmer than people supposed." And as the last thought passed through Bertha's mind, that same idea forced itself upon her which had caused the sigh and grave look her brother had remarked upon in their conversation the previous morning. That thoughts far from happy were working painfully in the brain of Esther Banks, her changing colour too plainly shewed. Bertha paused, hardly knowing what to say, but with the

ready tact for which women of all ages and countries have been ever famed, where matters of the *heart* and *feelings* are called into play, she adroitly turned the subject of conversation to their mutual friends at Blacklands.

"Is it long since you have seen the Bedfords, Miss Banks? How strange that, intimate as I am with their family, and so frequently as you and myself were staying with them at different times, we should never by any chance have met."

"Yes, it is somewhat strange," replied Esther, recovering her composure; "but I suppose it may be accounted for in a very simple way. If you remember, your visits were generally in the summer—mine always in the winter."

"Very true; you used to pass several months at a time with them, did you not?"

"Yes; they are a charming family, and I regret much that, my present home being so far from theirs, I have such rare opportunities of seeing them. I entertain a sincere regard for them all; they have ever shewn me the greatest kindness, and I should be most ungrateful, did I not feel both esteem and affection for them."

"And I am sure it is amply returned; for I often used to laugh, and tell them I was quite jealous, while they were speaking in such high terms of affectionate praise of you."

"Oh, yes; I know their kind partiality blinded them to my many, many faults. I am fully sensible they think more highly of me than I deserve; but the incense of *true* affection is so gratifying an offering, that callous indeed must be the heart which can remain insensible to it; mine at least is not made of such enviable materials. Would to Heaven it were!"



“ Ah ! say not so. I can fancy nothing more dreadful than a human being cursed with a real insensible heart ; one dead to all the finer feelings of our nature. What would this life be worth were we deprived of those kind offices, prompted by sympathy and friendship, and which we all require, more or less, from the affections of others rendered doubly sweet and soothing, when we see and know those little attentions spring from the warmth of heart and kindly feelings of the friend to whom we confide our sorrows ? How are the bitterest trials and most fearful sufferings alleviated, and rendered less poignant, by the sweet soothing of some loved and valued friend ? Surely a sensitive and feeling heart is as great a blessing to the possessor, as to those whose afflictions have been shared and softened by —— ”

“ No, no ; a too sensitive heart has many trials and is often deeply, deeply wounded, even by sharing the sorrows of others.”

“ But the apathetic and callous can know little of real happiness. I am certain an insensible disposition is not an enviable one.”

“ It may be as you say, but still I think there are natures so wholly selfish, so entirely wrapt up in themselves, that the joys or sorrows of the fellow creatures neither take from, nor add to the store of happiness ; and indeed I have often observed, that the most self-loving persons are generally the most contented, and the least disturbed by external things ; such griefs or pleasures as do not immediately interfere with their personal enjoyments pass by unheeded and uncared for, though perhaps, at the same time, those very sorrows or joys may raise to happiness, or sink to woe, their nearest relatives or dearest friends.”

"But surely you do not call such, an *enviable* state of existence?"

"I hardly know. I sometimes think it would be more conducive to a calm and peaceful state of mind, could we *feel* less and *think* more; more of the head and less of the heart; more of reason, and less of feeling; and I much doubt if there would not be a greater share of happiness in the world than there is."

"Then you mean to say, that could we weigh coolly every action, and not allow feeling to interfere with reason, much of the misery arising from actions prompted by impulse, would be spared."

"I think so."

"And yet you do not always *act* upon that conviction."

"I fear not."

"Would you have saved the life of your friend's beloved and only child, had you waited to ask yourself what might be the probable consequence of following an impulse, which led you, at the risk of your life, to wrap the terrified boy in your own dress, when he ran shrieking and on flames into your apartment? Was not that impulse?"

"Yes—no—I hardly think the action to which you allude could be called impulse; it rather arose from alarm."

"But still, had you waited to call reason to your aid; had you acted as a cautious or self-loving person undoubtedly would, fears for your own safety might have prompted you to avoid the danger, and instead of returning him but slightly injured to his agonized mother, at the expense of severe suffering to yourself, these parents might now be deploring the loss of their darling child."

"Oh, yes, yes! I do not like to recall that scene; it was terrible—very terrible!"

"Pardon me, my dear Miss Banks, if I have given you pain. Believe me, I meant it not; but the case appeared to apply so exactly to our argument, that I could hardly refrain from mentioning the noble deed, for in such a light I have always viewed it."

"Call it rather a simple act of humanity."

"Well, be it as you will; but if all actions arising from impulse end as that did, we could hardly be justified in condemning the feeling."

"But they do *not* always end well. You know Miss Bridgenorth, I believe?"

"Dear Hetty! Oh, yes, to be sure!"

"There is a creature of impulse—her every action is prompted by it; and see the innumerable mischiefs she is for ever running into, simply from allowing her feelings to get the better of her reason, or rather, I should say, seldom calling reason to her aid, until it is too late."

"I certainly must agree with you there; but then she is such a dear, kind-hearted little creature, one can scarcely be angry with her, let the consequence of her thoughtlessness be what it may. You were one of the party she had so nearly drowned, by upsetting the boat when attempting to reach some water-lilies on Loader Lake, at Blacklands, were you not?"

"Yes; and so sudden was the accident, that none of our party could tell how it happened. We all found ourselves in the water without being able even to guess by what means we came there. Fortunately another pleasure-boat was close to the one out of which we had been so unceremoniously thrown, and rendered us immediate assistance; so

no greater ill arose from our immersion, than the fright, wet clothes, and a few colds; but it *might* have been otherwise, for five out of the eight were ladies, who would must undoubtedly have been drowned, but for the aid so promptly afforded us. Rather a dear purchase those water-lilies would have proved to poor Miss Bridgenorth, paid for by the death of eight human beings. They caught her eye—she never calculated their distance, but springing up, on the *impulse* which led her to covet the possession of such beautiful flowers, attempted to reach them; but the sudden movement, and extra weight caused by her precipitate removal from one end of our light skiff to the other, gave it what sailors call a lurch, and away we all went. So much for *impulse*."

"You certainly have the best of the argument, and I willingly resign the victory. Perhaps in future I may be induced to view the subject in as sensible a light as you do; at all events, our dear friend Miss Bridgenorth is not exactly the person calculated to make one decide in favour of actions arising from that feeling; for, as you justly observe, the griefs and troubles she is continually bringing upon herself, simply, as my brother often tells her, by never making use of her brains, is both painful and ridiculous. But here comes Augustus," continued Bertha, looking from the window, "and——"

"I fear I have already intruded too long upon your time and kindness," said Esther, rising, while a faint blush passed over her usually pale cheek, and her hand slightly trembled, as she held it cut towards Miss Murray.

"Nay, do not run away from me yet; I have not asked half the questions I intended to try your patience with, about our friends in Devonshire."

"Another time, Miss Murray—another time," said Esther, hurriedly. "I have stretched my visit out to a most unconscionable length, considering it is the first."

"But I trust it will not be the *last*; indeed, I think you have not used me well, in being able to call this the *first*; but as you will go, tell me what I am to do, in regard to your proposed plan."

"Will you be in the Elm-Tree Walk to-morrow at three o'clock?"

"An earlier hour would suit me better."

"Name your own time, then. I only mentioned three, because I imagined it a part of the day less likely to interfere with your morning or afternoon arrangements than any other; would that be better?"

"Twelve than either."

"Then you promise to be in the Elm-Tree Walk to-morrow at twelve o'clock?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"Thank you, Miss Murray; I will be careful that my annoyance shall not be greater than can possibly be helped."

"Well, I leave the matter entirely in your hands; only I wish it could be avoided altogether."

"Of two evils it is wisest to choose the least, and I do not hesitate in pledging my word for being the last. And now, good morning, Miss Murray, with many thanks for the kind and friendly manner in which you have heard and granted what must appear to you my most singular and unreasonable request."

"From any but you, Miss Banks, I cannot decline. I should have considered such a proposal as very singular, to say the least of it; but I feel convinced

you weighed the matter well, before deciding upon such a course as you wish me to adopt; and I will be wholly guided by your better judgment, nor have any doubts about the result."

"And I trust I shall not forfeit the good opinion you have formed of me. Once more, good morning, Miss Murray; and may Heaven bless you!" So saying, Esther Banks hurried out of the room and house, before Bertha had time to return her affectionate adieu.

"And this, this is the splendid being whom my poor feeble-minded brother has dared to love. *Love!*" murmured Esther. "Ah, well! better for his future peace his thoughts and sensibilities are of so inferior a cast. This present infatuation will pass away, like many others; but sorrow be to that man, whose mind is strong, and whose heart and feelings could fully appreciate,—should *really* love Bertha Murray, and not have that love returned. How bitter, bitter, would be the trial of such a one? Love unrequited must be—is, *is*," cried she, passionately, "*is* hard to bear!"

"Ah, how strangely they are alike in their glorious beauty!—the same sweet voice, the same earnest look, the same noble, courtly, yet kind and graceful manner. Oh, that I had never, never—" the last of the sentence was lost in a choking sensation, which almost overcame the sad soliloquizer; and, casting herself on the green sod, she burst into an hysterical fit of weeping.

Alas, for thee, poor Esther! Many a kind and gentle heart like thine has been torn and broken; many a young and beauteous head laid low; many a fair and lovely being sent to the cold, dark, silent grave, ere half the joys of life had opened to her

view, and that same oft-repeated question, "Of what did she die?" replied to by that same oft-repeated answer, "Consumption!"

Oh! consumption! thou other name for a broken heart.

"This is wrong—wicked," said Esther, rising while a deep blush of shame and self-reproach dyed her cheek, mounting to her very temples. "This is self-degradation, indeed! Oh, that I could shake off these miserable feelings; but they gain strength every day, and I cannot, cannot help it. That voice—oh! that sweet—sweet voice—so low, so deep, so rich—so beautiful. I talk of my poor brother's presumption! Am I not as bad? Yes, yes; worse, much worse. I have sense enough to see my own folly, and he has not.

"Oh, that I could flee from myself!—this overwhelming sense of my own inferiority; this tormentingly debasing consciousness of loving, where it is not returned! Oh, I cannot endure the contemplation of such deep, bitter humiliation! 'Tis a fierce struggle—grant, Heaven, I may have strength to bear up against it."

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## CHAPTER IX.

"MAY I be permitted the deep honour of escorting you, this balmy, love-inspiring morning, adored and too beautiful Miss Murray," squeaked the small, thin, whistle-like voice of Botherem Banks as he approached, hat in hand, bowing to the ground. "Say but 'Yes,' and make me the happiest of your slaves."

"You are both complimentary and obliging, Mr. Banks," replied Bertha, with difficulty repressing a smile, as she called to mind for what purpose she had consented to this meeting; but remembering the promise she had given his sister, to endure patiently the utmost annoyance his exceeding folly and overwhelming protestations of devotion, when suffered to take his own course unchecked, would subject her to, she restrained the rising smile, and presenting her hand, inquired kindly after his health.

"Amiable and gracefully condescending—most charming of women!" began Botherem; but ere the sentence was finished, away darted the speaker to a flower-bed he espied at some hundred feet off.

"Poor creature!" mused Bertha, "I would not willingly wound his vanity, or pain his feelings; but it is far more cruel to him, than vexatious to me, thus allowing him to continue under the strange delusion that has given rise to his incessant persecutions of me, for so many months past.

"Esther Banks appeared so firmly convinced, that by letting him run his whole course of folly, the scene I should have to endure, though annoying and perhaps distressing, would be the last display of his grotesque absurdities—to *me*, at least,—that I will rather encourage than repel his advances. Miss Banks is a far-seeing, clear-headed woman, and I am certain she would not have proposed so extraordinary a mode of proceeding, had she felt the least doubtful concerning its result.

"As I place entire confidence in her judgment, so will I be wholly guided by her advice, though I fear it will prove a sad trial, not only to my enduring, but my risible faculties. However, as I



have pledged my word, I cannot recede, and I sooner this odd interview is over, the better for parties."

These thoughts had been passing in fair Berth head, while her adorer skipped off *sans chapeau* (having laid it at her feet on his first approach) gather a splendid moss rose, his restless eye unfortunate lit upon, while *endeavouring* to look M Murray in the face, which said endeavour he vainly attempted to perfect some half thousand times, and as often failed; for, whether it was owing to certain strange nervous twitchings about his own singularly beautiful orbs, or from causes every way inexplicable, Botherem Banks was never known, through the whole course of his life, have looked any human being directly in the face, and the consequence was, that instead of meeting the gaze of those with whom he conversed, his visual organs were roving here, there, and everywhere but towards the person who should have been his object of observation.

If this distressing state of agitating inability meet the eye of those he conversed with, assailed him in the presence of ordinary acquaintance, what must have been his sufferings at the moment when standing in immediate proximity to her, "Her soul's best idol?"

Truly, truly it was dreadful, almost beyond endurance. The rebel orbs would bear no control, but flew about most strangely to behold, now raised high, now dropping low, now gazing on vacancy in the northern quarter, now intently staring at the blazing sun, as he shone out blindingly bright from the sweet south, nor heeded how Sol made him wink.

Poor Botherem! Oh, little did the thought

less multitude guess thy sufferings, caused by this shabby trick Dame Nature so unkindly played thee, made tenfold more poignant by the perfect conviction thou entertained of thine eyes' great beauty, when kindly consenting to keep still and fixed.

Ere Bertha had quite finished her mental colloquy, Botherem Banks was again at her side ; and holding out the captured rose, exclaimed, " Fairest of the fair, receive this fairest of the flowers ! As she is queen of all gardens, so art thou queen of all hearts."

" I can only repeat what I have just said, Mr. Banks," replied Bertha, " that you are both obliging and complimentary. I receive your offering with thanks ; it is indeed most beautiful, and fully deserves the title so frequently bestowed upon it. Have you injured your hand ?" she continued, kindly, perceiving him thrust two of his fat fingers into his capacious mouth, and commence sucking them with a violence and velocity that threatened to remove the flesh from the bone, and caused the blood to rush furiously into his sallow face, until his cheeks bore a striking resemblance to a pair of ill-grown winter apples—" What is the matter ? I fear you have run a thorn from the rose-bush into your finger."

" I have a thorn from two roses, one in my finger, the other in my heart ; but blessed be the anguish I suffer from both."

" You speak metaphorically, in one instance at least ; and I trust the *anguish* arising from the other is not more than can be borne. What shall I do to relieve your sufferings ? It is a most painful thing, I know. Had you not better try to extract it ?"

" Oh, no, no !"

"No! Why not? If you leave the thorn in, it will rankle, and perhaps cause you great inconvenience."

"Ah, no! most angelic of womankind; it was in thy service I received my wound, and I glory to carry the scar about with me; breathe but on the lacerated part, and instantaneous will be its cure."

"Oh! if that is all required for its recovery," said Bertha, laughingly complying with his strange request, "I should be more than cruel to refuse such slight, small aid; but come, as the morning is so exceedingly fine, and I have only just left home, we will, if you feel disposed to accompany me, extend our walk beyond what I had originally intended, and stroll as far as Christie's nursery-ground. You have no objection, I suppose?"

"Objection!" ejaculated Botherem Banks, in a voice rendered almost inaudible, through delight and emotion; "objection, did you say, most adorable Miss Murray? Ask the martyr approaching his stake does he object to the sufferings he is about to undergo, and then ——"

"Dear me, Mr. Banks, what very extraordinary comparisons you do draw; where, in the name of all that is wonderful, can there be the slightest similitude between a martyr going to the stake, and your taking a country walk with me this beautiful morning?"

"Thus! Both lead to happiness."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Bertha, gaily. "I fear I am but a dull listener at times, for I cannot always arrive with your own speed of thought at your (to me) rather mystical allusions; but doubtless the fault rests with me. I never was ready at solving riddles."

"Do I speak unintelligibly?" exclaimed Botherem,

in a voice that made his fair companion start. "Do I speak unintelligibly? Say the word again; and let—oh, let me be more explicit! Let thy slave pour forth all the hidden secrets of his enraptured heart; let him lay bare the hopes and fears that torture his devoted breast."

"Pray, Mr. Banks, *do* try and talk like a sober, rational being. This strain of rhapsody is ill suited for the sensible realities of a rural walk in pursuit of health and amusement," said Bertha, endeavouring to look grave, but feeling exceedingly disposed to indulge in a merry laugh; "be kind enough to remember, Mr. Banks, while addressing me, that I am an amazingly straightforward, unimaginative person; and the less of allegory or highlights you indulge in when conversing with me, the more readily will it suit my somewhat limited understanding, and the better shall I be pleased."

"Your slightest wish, adored Miss Murray, has ever been the willingly obeyed law of thy slave's existence. Tell me—but tell me, in what form of speech can a worm like me address the fairest daughter of our fallen race, and I will adopt it."

"Precisely and exactly as all daughters of our fallen race should be addressed; at least, all such as have no greater pretensions than my poor humble self."

"Obliging, graceful, heavenly condescension!—may I dare to offer the assistance of my arm?"

"Doubtless; and I thank you, too. The ascent of this slope is rather tiring, and I feel obliged for your timely proffered aid. I trust I shall not inconvenience you by my additional weight," continued she, passing her hand through the extended arm of the now superlatively happy Botherem.

It was the first time he had ever dreamed—thought, or presumed to be so bold; and only to imagine the state of ecstasy this simple action threw our poor bewildered friend into, would be wholly, utterly, and every way impossible.

That *she*, the star of his existence, the beloved of his heart—she, his soul's idol, should be leaning familiarly on his arm, apologizing lest she should inconvenience him by accepting his proffered aid; that he should be actually walking side by side with her his worshipped fair, was happiness far, far too great for his philosophy to bear unmoved. No, it could *not* be borne with any degree of ordinary composure; Botherem *felt* it could not—poor fellow! His felicity was beyond his own control; he knew not how to give it tongue in measured terms.

He laughed, he talked, he pranced, he ambled, he capered; he looked, (or rather tried to look,) he sighed, he puffed—grew red, grew pale, trembled, coughed, hemmed, panted, endeavoured to talk, and look again; but not succeeding, dropped into a dead silence, and then, wholly unable either to suppress, or give vent to the overwhelming feelings of joyous delight that had so completely taken possession of, and mastered him, he burst out into a violent fit of loud sobbing.

"Really, Mr. Banks, you quite alarm me. What can possibly be the cause that so strangely agitates you?" said Bertha, terrified at the poor man's excessive emotion. "Do, I entreat you, endeavour to calm yourself, or I must leave you in search ——"

"Leave me not—leave me not," gasped the almost suffocated Botherem. "I am better. Oh! how much better? Those lucid drops have already

ceased my over-wrought feelings. Pardon—pardon, fairest of thy sex, this momentary weakness ; but the fault is thine, too charming Bertha ! This great, unlooked for, wondrous condescension, was more, far more, than my already excited brain and agitated feelings could bear unmoved."

" I am glad to see you recovering, Mr. Banks ; but could I have imagined the acceptance of your very common act of courtesy would lead to such painful results, believe me I should have declined it altogether."

" Oh, fairest, most adored, most beloved, most revered of womankind, what can I, what shall I say in thanks for thy beneficent, thy more than mortal kindness, and soul-touching affability ? Here, on my knees, let me pour forth the love and gratitude, the deep devotion, the thrilling, absorbing, blessed torture of love and adoration, that at one moment tears my throbbing heart with agony, the next, raises me above my fellow-men. Oh, Bertha, empress of my soul, bright beacon of my earthly existence, star of my future destiny, hear me.

" Nay, I rise not ; here will I lie prostrate at thy beauteous feet ; here will I grovel in the dust ; here will I kiss the ground upon which thou standest, until—until——" Again the fit of blubbering o'ercame the hapless bard, and he wept long and loud.

It certainly was a great trial ; one almost too much, even for Bertha Murray, accustomed as she had been to poor Botherem's ceaseless display of absurdity and folly, to witness with any degree of self-possession.

Upon the first outbreak of his crying fit, she was really not only grieved, but alarmed, fearing

she might be inflicting more pain on her sir suitor than she had deemed his frothy nature capable of feeling; but when, like a chastised school-boy, he again began his bellowing, all such feelings vanished, and *she* felt far more inclined to *laugh* than *weep*; nor can we blame her; for, as he lifted up his queer-coloured, tear-swollen face, on which the most irresistibly piteous expression was strongly depicted, sure never before did woman's eye look on so hideous an object.

Of all the pitiful, contemptible, ludicrous things in this world, is a very ugly, silly, mean-looking little man, with a weeping visage, on his knees making love to a beautiful woman.

"Indeed, Mr. Banks," said Bertha, to recover her self-possession by a determined effort, "make me very uncomfortable. Rise, I beseech you. I can neither listen to, nor answer you, while you remain in that position—pray rise!" saying which she involuntarily stretched forth her beautiful hand as if intending to assist him. But, alas, no sooner did he catch sight of those fair fingers, than, all the quick fancies of a loving poet, imagining the hand so extended was intended for his salute, he seized upon that luckless member with the avidity of a famished wolf, and commenced such a furious assault of loud, and far-sounding kisses thereon, that poor Bertha began to entertain serious doubts concerning his sanity, and he regretted having exposed herself to the wild varieties of one who appeared to be little short of a lunatic; but this feeling lasted only for a moment, the grotesque was far too predominant to admit of aught like serious or fixed alarm, and, releasing her imprisoned hand by an effort of great strength, she burst into a long and uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"Am I mocked?" screamed the now wretched poet, starting to his feet. "No, no, it cannot be; dearest Bertha, say this was but the momentary ebullition of your over-strained, too deeply excited feelings; say your agitation at this trying scene, equalled, if not exceeded, my own; say it—say it, beloved, adored Bertha, and ease my doubt-torn heart; say you do not scorn my agonizing love! Tell me—tell me," moaned he, again dropping on his knees—"tell me you intended not to mock me, if you would not see me stretched a miserable corpse before you."

"Indeed, indeed, I had not the slightest intention of giving pain, I can assure you, Mr. Banks," replied Bertha, now really grieved at the woe-begone look, the distress and despair so strongly painted on the swollen countenance of her abject adorer; "but if you *will* throw yourself into such very extraordinary attitudes, it is quite impossible to listen, and look with any degree of gravity or composure. I fear it will be long ere we reach the end of our walk, if, instead of using your feet you persist in keeping a kneeling position. Rise, I once more entreat you, Mr. Banks. I really can endure these violent outbursts no longer; and if you will not speak and act like a rational creature, I must positively wish you good morning, and return home."

"Stay, yet one moment—stay, angelic Bertha, empress of my soul; listen, oh, listen, to the earnest pleadings of thy humblest worshipper. Thus will I remain glued to the earth until you consent to be *mine*—mine for ever—oh, the ecstatic thought, be *mine*—be mine, and——"

"Hold, hold, Mr. Banks! this is going a little too far; what, may I ask, have you ever discovered



in my manner towards yourself, which could, by any possibility, be construed into other feeling than that of friendship? Surely you could not so far have misunderstood me as to imagine I entertained any sentiment in reference to yourself; but that of *friendship*; or that my patient endurance of your rather strange, and somewhat intrusive attentions, proceeded from any other motive than an unwillingness to wound your self-love, or inflict pain. If, unfortunately, you have allowed yourself to fall into the distressing error of supposing I regarded you in any light but that of a *friend*, I am seriously grieved, and the sooner you are undeceived, the better will it be for your own happiness, and my peace."

Could any one less interested than Bertha Murray, in this, to her, now vastly annoying scene, have beheld poor Botherem Banks, it is rather difficult to say what impression the figure of our kneeling suppliant might have made upon his imagination, whether of pity, contempt, fear, sympathy, or overwhelming merriment.

There he *sprawled* rather than knelt; his goggle eyes stretched wide, very wide, open; his large mouth bearing the exact appearance of a butterfly-catcher in the act of seizing its prey; his great hands clasped with such determined energy, as to force the broad flat square fingers of the one hand, into the fat on the back of the other. Those said hands extended considerably beyond limit, or boundary, of both wristband and coat-cuff. His feet, alack—those feet, those never-ending sources of mental lament, and inward repining to the unfortunate possessor—working about with steam-wheel rapidity; ay, with such inconceivably nervous velocity did Botherem shift them from left to right,

and back again from right to left, that the terminations to his fair nankeens, although he had taken especial care to select and don the longest pair of his entire stock, were so completely ensconced *within* the mouth of his capacious boot-top, that the wearer's legs presented an appearance far better adapted to support the body of some huge eel-fisher, than the weeping wooer of a lady fair.

Gentle maiden, say, couldst thou have beheld such an one suing at thy feet, asking for thy *love*, and looked grave the while? Surely, surely not;—need pardon be entreated for sweet Bertha's mirth? You answer, "No."

"You cast me off—you scorn my love—you ridicule my sufferings—you condemn me to death,—a death of lingering torture, of unbearable agony. Cruel, cruel, heartless, insensible, obdurate woman! Hear me—listen to my spirit-broken pleadings! Give me but one little ray of hope, one spark of consolation; say you will pause ere I am consigned to hapless, hopeless, dark, black, rayless, bitter, bitter woe; let me but *hope*, and I will ascend the highest mountain, I will dive into the fearful whirlpool; I will beard the fierce lion in his den; court cold, hunger, pain; watch the live-long night midst howling winds and pelting storms; I will brave danger in every form, and glory in my trials; I will crawl to the world's end on my hands and knees, to gain one little smile, one smile of approbation, one blessed word of cheering hope; Bid, oh, bid me hope!"

"Indeed, I cannot; if by *hope* you mean a return of that affection you so lavishly force upon me. I tell you, Mr. Banks, clearly and distinctly, and I would have you to consider it as my final, unalterable answer, that beyond *friendship* I have nothing

to give you. I tell you again, I grieve to inflict unnecessary pain, and would willingly avoid so doing were it possible; but as you seem determined to persist in thinking time may make some change in my sentiments, I must enforce upon you the utter fallacy of cherishing so mistaken an idea; and the sooner you allow the reality of what I am now saying to impress itself upon your imagination, so much sooner will you be enabled to shake off the unfortunate infatuation under which you are now suffering."

"And this, this, is your fixed, determined, most cruel resolve?"

"It is."

"Unalterable?"

"I have already told you so."

"Can nothing move you?—no prayers soften your inexorable decree?"

"Really, Mr. Banks, this is but prolonging an already painfully lengthened, and distressing scene; if you will not drop the subject, now and for ever, I must do what I would willingly, most willingly avoid,—leave you in displeasure, and meet you hereafter as a stranger."

"Alas—alas! and *this* is the end of all my fond anticipations! This is the last hour in which I dare indulge one, one thought of happiness—one more dream of bliss! Oh, why was I born?" whimpered he; "why am I suffered to draw the hated breath of life, or longer look upon the loathed light of day?"

"Pray, Mr. Banks, endeavour to shake off this foolishly morbid feeling you are so vainly giving way to. Such words as those you have just uttered are not only wrong, but wicked—nay, almost impious. Why will you, by thus obstinately persisting

to indulge a passion, you know full well can never be returned, mar your own happiness, and distress those who wish you well?"

"Happiness! Talk of happiness to me! to the wretch whom your cold, cruel disdain has driven to distraction! Oh, woman, woman! where are all thy boasted sensibilities?—or is she, this fairest daughter of creation, the only one that knows it not?"

"I trust, Mr. Banks, I am neither without sensibility nor feeling; and if I have appeared less gentle or less kind than I might, or should have done, I can only say I am truly sorry, but you left me no middle course. If I have seemed harsh and hasty, I crave your pardon. Farewell; I trust we part as friends."

"No, no; we part not so; stay yet one moment longer."

"For what purpose? Nay, suffer me to go," said Bertha, endeavouring to remove her dress from the strong grasp Botherem had just fixed upon it. "Pray, release me; I would be gone."

"Not until I have your promise, your sworn promise!" shouted Botherem, starting to his feet—"promise," continued he, looking very wild, "that you —"

"I will promise nothing, Mr. Banks," exclaimed Bertha, angrily. "I have told you how exceedingly offensive and unbecoming this violence is. I will not be compelled, against my own judgment and inclination, to pledge my word for what hereafter I may, perhaps, repent."

"Pardon, pardon!" whined Botherem, in his most abject tone; "pardon, I beseech thee, the errors of a wretch, thou, thy beauteous self, hast driven to desperation. Bear with me yet a little

longer—hear my last, my dying request, nor turn with loathing from thy wretched slave !”

“ If you have a *request* to make, Mr. Banks, replied Bertha, kindly, pleased at hearing him return so readily to his own natural voice, and peculiar mode of speech, and really feeling relieved by this change from his late manner, “ I will readily—most readily—grant your demand—that is to say should it be within my power so to do.”

“ It is within your power.”

“ Then name it.”

“ Attend yourself ! be present at my funeral !”

“ Merciful powers, Mr. Banks ! you really ramble on most strangely. Ask me to be a mourner at ——”

“ I do not desire you to be a *mourner*. No ; too too happy will you be, when I, swept like a worthless reptile from this earth’s bright face, lie mouldering in the cold and silent grave.”

“ Your speech is not only complex, but contradictory. If I attend your funeral, you will surely give me credit for being a mourner—at least the while, though but to keep up appearances ; and how is it possible you can be mouldering in the grave while the obsequies of your interment are only in progress ?”

“ I cannot follow your argument ; my brain reels, my temples throb, the hand of death is upon me ; I sink to the dark abyss of dissolution, and there is none who will stretch forth a hand to aid me or to save !”

“ You draw a gloomy picture of your own sad state, Mr. Banks ; but though you view it with a jaundiced eye, I fear you would find a difficult task to make others think your dying day so very near as you yourself seem determined to imagine it !”

"Mock on—scorn, sneer, revile, upbraid! 'tis all, 'tis all the same to me! Grim death's relentless, icy hand is tightly grappling at my broken heart, and soon shall all my sorrows cease—my woes be laid at rest!"

"Well, Mr. Banks, if you *will* have it so, I certainly cannot be rude enough to contradict, nor vainly try, (for vain, I am sure, would be the attempt, in your present frame of mind,) to argue you out of such sepulchral thoughts as it is your present will and pleasure to indulge in; but would it not be as polite, after having raised my curiosity, to gratify it, by telling me what the request is you so earnestly wish me to grant."

"Have I not already informed you?" groaned the wretched, and now wrathful Botherem; "have I not just made it? and have you not refused?"

"Doubtless; but it is quite out of the power of possibility to imagine, for one instant, that you could be in earnest, while making so strange a demand; ask me to do anything that has reason in it, and you will find I am not so selfish as to refuse."

"One more favour I have to beg, which you must—*nay, shall, grant!*"

"Well."

"Place my elegy in your last new album! Will you do it?"

"Why, one request is as singular as the other; but who is to write it?"

"Indeed—indeed, none other than myself!"

"No!"

"Yes, and sadly plaintive shall it be!"

"But, surely, you would not wish me to put the elegy of a living man among——"

"Do you still deny my last, for ever last, petition?"

"Undoubtedly ; because I cannot comply."

"All, all, refused and scorned! Oh, Bertha Murray! cruel, but too well beloved, may you never feel such tortures as now rack thy slighted, though faithful, faithful lover!" saying which, he struck his poor forehead such a blow, as to cause his diminutive frame to stagger and reel under the infliction, and darting off at full speed, he never halted until gaining his own apartment, and locking the door he threw himself violently on his bed, and once more fell a weeping.

"Poor creature!" said Bertha, gazing after him—"poor creature! Well may such a woman as Esther Banks feel ashamed of a thing like that; one would think it scarcely possible they could be brother and sister; she is as superior a being, and he is immeasurably inferior!"

"I trust, sincerely trust, she was right though when she assured me of her firm conviction that nothing serious would ensue from my positive denial of his suit;" and here, despite any lurking misgivings that forced themselves upon her mind fair Bertha could not suppress a smile at the absurd idea of accepting such a *droll* for her lord and master.

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## CHAPTER X.

"DEAR me," said Mrs. Banks, suddenly looking up from the desk, at which she was busily arranging her bills, and peeping over her spectacles at Esther, who sat opposite, quietly engaged upon some plain piece of needle-work—"dear me, what can all that noise

be about? I'm sure I hear Botherem's voice, and is not that his bell ringing so furiously? I am afraid something is the matter; do go Esther, and see if anything is wrong."

"Pray, don't be alarmed, mamma; it is only poor Botherem in one of his fits of inspiration, or *desperation*," replied Esther, smiling, and lowering her voice at the last word, "do not trouble yourself to come up; I will go and see what he wants."

"There is something the matter with Mr. Botherem," said a pair of pretty housemaids, flying up the kitchen stairs, and almost knocking Esther down in their eagerness to find out what ailed the poet, as they invariably called Botherem. "Perhaps he's ill, miss; I never heard him ring his bell so afore."

"No, no; he is not ill, Sarah. Go back and finish your dinner; I will see what my brother wants, I trust there is nothing very particularly wrong—go down stairs again."

"Yes, miss;" and away scampered the two damsels.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear! what shall I do? Oh, that nasty stuff! Will no one come to me? I shall die! No, I shan't—yes, I shall. Oh, dear! Do, pray, some kind body come to me. I am dying—I am dying!"

"What's the matter, Botherem?" said Esther, approaching his bed; "you seem very ill; are you in much pain?"

"Oh, yes; oh, yes! I'm torn to pieces; that abominable, nasty stuff! I never would have touched it, if I could have guessed how it would—oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"What can I do to relieve you?" said Esther, kindly, with much difficulty suppressing a smile;



for though blessed by nature with one of the kindest and most feeling hearts, Esther Banks was keenly alive to a sense of the ridiculous, and she never was a more absurd figure beheld by human eyes than the grotesque form of poor Botherem at that moment.

There he sat, in the middle of his bed, rocking to and fro, his red hair bedewed with perspiration, his glassy, stupid eyes distended beyond their normal rotundity, his little pug nose drawn up with such intense force, as almost to render the thing invisible, his large mouth propelled forward until the corners quite met the extreme ends of his lower jaw; his great, fat, white hands, now almost blue with terror rather than poison, grasped a wash-hand basin, which he held convulsively between his knees, the knees themselves being elevated to nearly a level with his cheeks, of necessity brought the sufferer's face within the bare concavity, and as he peeped ruefully over its rim uttering the most grievous groans and unheeded noises imaginable, Esther, with all her very best efforts in play, was wholly unable, upon taking a second look at poor Botherem's contorted visage, to repress the rising smile, which, passing over his features before she had sufficiently turned her head to avoid his observation, caught the unhappy man's attention, who, giving a piteous moan, sank back upon his pillow, and bursting into tears exclaimed, "Oh, I am dying—I am dying! Must all poor poets who poison themselves for love be laughed at, ridiculed and held in derision? Oh, Bertha, Bertha! have you not to answer for?"

"Poison! Botherem, what do you mean by that? You surely have not been wicked enough to  
*poison!*"

"Yes, yes I have ; but I did not think it would make me so sick, or I should never have tried it. Oh, dear—oh, dear ! it is so unpoetical to be sick. Oh, dear, dear, dear ! what shall I do ?"

"For mercy sake, Botherem, tell me what you have been taking, before it is too late !"

"Laudanum, laudanum, laudanum !" replied he, with a groan and shake of the head between each word, as if it were very nasty indeed.

"What did you take it out of ?"

"This !" producing from among the bedclothes a very, *very* small phial, with not quite half the contents gone. "Oh, dear !"

In a glance Esther perceived there was nothing like danger to be apprehended, for had he swallowed the entire contents of that diminutive bottle, it could have wrought no greater evil than giving him a good sound sleep ; and so, thinking the best way to silence his terrors would be, to draw him into conversation, she seated herself by his bedside, and parting the damp hair from his poor clammy forehead, began by asking him where he had procured the laudanum from.

"I always keep it by me to cure the toothache."

"And have you taken half of what was in that bottle ?"

"No ; I had used some of it before."

"But surely, dear Botherem, you did not intend to poison yourself ?"

"No ;" answered he, looking very foolish—"I did not mean to destroy myself, but I thought that if the laudanum would throw me into a kind of slumber, and I could lie for two or three days like one in a trance, looking pale and interesting, *she* might be implored to come and see me, when, perhaps, taking pity on my sufferings, and thinking

me *really* dead, her affection for me would return, and as conscience smote her for her cruelty to one who had loved and died for her, she might wish me alive again, and then when I did recover,—oh dear, oh dear, I feel so sick!”

“Never mind, dear Botherem, it will all pass away, and to-morrow you may feel as well as ever you did in your life.”

“No no; existence has no charms for me now.”

“Do not say so; there is much of happiness in store for you yet.”

“But should it ever come to Bertha’s ears, *that* I had been so—*so* sick—she would scorn me *more* than ever.”

“I do not think Miss Murray unkind enough to scorn any human being. It is not because *she* cannot return your affection that she *scorns* you dear Botherem—believe me.”

“Oh, dear! could I but have thought it would make me feel so very ill! Oh, what shall I do?”

“Drink this,” said Esther, offering him a mixture she had been down stairs to fetch, and which she knew would be of service to him.

“What is it, Esther?”

“Never mind, dear Botherem, take it.”

“Then you really think I am dying?”

“Indeed, I think no such a thing; in my opinion you never, never were further from it in your life.”

“I am glad of that, for there can be no doubt suicide is a great sin.”

“Do not talk about it, Botherem—the bare idea is enough to make one shudder.”

“Yes, so it is; but remember, Esther, I had no intention of *killing* myself.”

“I sincerely hope you had not,—nay, I am sur—

you could never have entertained so terrible a notion, not even for a moment."

"Indeed, indeed, I only meant to throw myself into a state of interesting insensibility, as I told you before, that Bertha might relent; but I am afraid I was wrong."

"There can be no doubt about that, Botherem; but, come, drink what is in the glass; it will do you good—I assure you it will."

"Are you certain, dear Esther?" asked Botherem, who had been for the last five minutes stirring, peeping, and tasting, as if he feared there might be some more of the nasty stuff that had made him so ill at the bottom. "Must I drink it all?"

"If you can."

"There!" said Botherem, tossing it off—"I have drank the whole, and 'tis not so bad either."

"It is not bad at all, Botherem dear; it will relieve you of that unpleasant feeling of nausea under which you are now suffering; and, perhaps, before long, cause you to drop off into a refreshing sleep."

"Ah, that's all very well, and very kind of you, dear Esther! But suppose Bertha should ever find out I had been so sick?"

"But she never shall find it out; there is no one to tell her. Mamma is very busy with her accounts, the girls are all out—gone to a fancy show—and probably may not be back until late in the evening, by which time you will be well enough to be up and dressed, the servants are at dinner, and, be quite sure, you need not fear me."

"Oh! no, no, dear Esther, I can always put confidence in you; but then, think of the horrid disgrace—I shall never recover it. Oh, dear! to be so sick,—how unpoetical!"

"Indeed, I differ from you there, Botherem;—a

love-sick poet is a thing that has been talked of ever since the world began."

"True, true—yes, so it has; but then that does not mean *this* sort of sickness," moaned Botherem looking wofully at the basin. "Mental, not physical sickness is what people mean when they make use of that expression. Oh, dear! if she *should* ever find it out, I should die with shame."

"Now do not agitate and distress yourself unnecessarily, dear Botherem; you are grieving for what will never happen. Instead of lamenting about imaginary ills, you ought to be most grateful your foolishly imprudent act brought no worse results than that which you so pathetically deplore. Miss Murray need never know a word of the matter, unless, indeed, you or I choose to tell her which I fancy is not very likely."

"Ah, no!" sighed Botherem, settling his head comfortably on his pillow, as he felt the soothing influence of Esther's draught steal pleasingly over him—"Ah, no! she need never know it; but *that* I shall *fancy* she does, and feel so ashamed of myself whenever I meet her out or see her at church. Oh, if it would but have thrown me into a trance how different might things have been!"

"If you will only listen patiently to me, and be guided by my advice, all that which you seem so much to dread may be avoided. I have a plan in my head, Botherem, I think you will approve;—what do you say to leaving home for a few months?"

"Oh, I should like it beyond all things; but how can it be managed?"

"Why, don't you know our dear old friend Mr Bland has given me an invitation to——"

"Yes, but he don't want *me* when he asks *you*

"I will arrange that, dear Botherem. A few

days back, Mrs. Wellford wrote to request I would come and stay the summer with her. I had made up my mind to refuse, but now it strikes me that if I write to Mr. Bland, saying, we will both spend a few weeks with him—should you feel yourself comfortable, and you get on tolerably well with the kind old man, I can leave you there, as Fairborough lies exactly in the road to Dellwood, and pay my visit to Mrs. Wellford. What say you, Botherem? do you agree to it?"

"Oh, yes, yes; when shall we go?"

"Why, the sooner the better, I think."

"Is Fairborough a very beautiful place?"

"Exceedingly beautiful. Mr Bland's grounds are close to the sea-side, and the scenery is lovely beyond description."

"Is he a nice man?"

"One of the dearest, most kind-hearted creatures in existence."

"And do you think I shall be able to do as I like when I am there?"

"Certainly,—there is no human being to control you; he never interferes with his visitor's pursuits, and so long as you do not keep him waiting for his meals, you will never find him out of humour."

"Are there any ladies in the house?"

"None—not one. Mr. Bland, you know, is a bachelor, and excepting an excellent old woman who is his housekeeper, and the female servants, you will find few women's tongues to interrupt your studies."

"Oh," ejaculated Botherem, "I am glad of that; I fear I shall come to hate the whole sex! My heart is broken—my affections laid waste—life has no charms for me now."

"Indeed, I must not have you talk so, Botherem! There is much of happiness in store for you ye who knows but that you may find some blue-eye fair-haired maiden to supply the place of——"

"Cease, cease, sister!—such words from any *body* you would be a downright insult. Name it not, I implore you, name it not. My heart is crushed; *my* hopes, *all* hopes of happiness, withered and gone—gone for ever!"

"Well, I trust you will tell a different tale before three months have past away; indeed, I *feel* sure you will."

"Never, never; misery is my portion, an *everlasting* grave my doom!"

"Come, come, dear Botherem, you must *not* give way to such thoughts as these; you know *well* the old song says, 'A lover rejected, a new lover may get,' and I wager my Milton, that long *er* you return from Fairborough, some damsel, passing fair, shall have captivated your sensitive heart."

"Such words are treason against her I love."

"Remember what your favourite Shakspeare says: 'That men have died from time to time, and women too—and worms have eat them,—but not from *love*.'"

"That's false; *men do* die from love."

"I think not; *men*, at least, seldom die of love, though *women* may;" and poor Esther sighed.

"Quite the reverse, Esther. Men feel love *far* more deeply than your sex."

"Nay, nay, Botherem, women *suffer* love; men only *feel* it, or *fancy* they do."

"Wrong, wrong, dear sister, as our minds are stronger, so are our passions more intense!"

"But then, those passions and feelings are more diversified. A man fancies he loves—goes forth

into the world—and business, occupation, pleasure—a thousand things come in the way to attract his attention and divert his thoughts; but woman, when she loves, cannot throw her sorrows from her. The very habits of woman's existence serve to strengthen and increase that love, which too often—Well, well, dear Botherem," said Esther, blushing at her own earnest manner of discussing the subject, "perhaps you may be right, after all. It would be far better for us, were we to think less about such things than we do."

"Not so. Love is the most beautiful feeling our natures are capable of."

"How much of misery might be spared us, could we but reason *before* we love, instead of *after*."

"True; but then it would be no longer *love*!"

"Quite right, Botherem; love and reason rarely meet together, or what shall we say to love at first sight."

"'Tis an uncontrollable passion," sighed Botherem.

"*It is*," thought Esther.

"Do you think Bertha Murray was ever in love?"

"That is a difficult question to answer."

"Oh, she is very beautiful!" groaned the poet.

"Perfectly beautiful!"

"And I shall never see her more!"

"Oh, yes, you will."

"But why should I wish it? The sight of her lovely face would only open my wounds afresh. No, I will never behold her again!"

"Time heals all sorrows; and that which, perhaps, appears almost unbearable at the beginning of the year, may be looked upon with calm compla-



gency at the end of it. Time will do that for us which nothing else can ; and grateful ought we to be that it is so."

" *Some* woes time may cure ; but slighted love never."

" It will soften the poignancy of our sufferings if it cannot remove them altogether."

" Not such sorrows as mine."

" Oh, yes, Botherem, and a thousand times greater."

" Will you tell me that man or woman exists whose heart, torn and broken like mine, could dare be presumptuous enough to hope for aught like peace on this side of the grave ?"

" Many a one—far, far more miserable than you now think yourself, have lived to see bright and happy days, and looked back with shame and repentance at the time, when, almost impiously, they gave way to what they then thought hopeless misery, nor humbly placed reliance on a merciful Providence that never fails to aid us in our utmost hour of need."

" Oh, you know not what it is to love, dear Esther, or you would not speak of happiness to me !"

" Our sorrows are our own," thought poor Esther, " and well it should be so. I would not for worlds have others guess my utter wretchedness."

" Well, Botherem," said his sister, after a pause, in which many sad thoughts had crowded unbidden on her mind, " I think we have discussed this matter long enough ; suppose you try and go to sleep."

" Not yet, not yet—I have much to tell you ; besides, I like talking to you when we are alone ; for

no one seems to listen, and take such interest in me as you do, dear Esther. You really are very kind—very."

"I wish to be so, Botherem; but our feelings and actions are not always in unison; at least I am afraid *mine* are not."

"When did you say we should start for Sussex?"

"About the middle of next week."

"And shall you be obliged to leave me there?"

"Why not?"

"Because I should feel much more comfortable if you could manage to stay."

"Oh, you know the distance between Dellwood and Fairborough is a mere nothing! We shall often see each other; besides, when you are once there, I know you will be in no hurry to run away, and my visit will not exceed two months at Mrs. Wellford's, as I wish to get back before the autumn; so that supposing, instead of going on to Dellwood, I were to remain that time at Mr. Bland's, why, I should leave you there, after all, for I am certain he will not let you off under four or five months at least, nor will you, I am convinced, be in any hurry to leave Fairborough, it is such a sweet place."

"With plenty to amuse one?"

"Everything you can think of. Fishing, hunting, shooting, rowing, gardening, if you feel disposed."

"No, no—I shall have nothing to do with gardening; it spoils one's hands so."

"Well, that you can please yourself about. Mr. Bland wont insist upon your using the spade, I'll venture to say; he is too fond of gardening himself, to require much assistance—from visitors, at least."

"Has he a good library?"

"Excellent."

"And you really think I shall be able to exist there?"

"Not only *exist*, dear Botherem, but be very happy; at least, if you are not, it will be your own fault."

"Happy," groaned Botherem, "happy, while I drag about this weary chain of misery!"

"Pooh, Botherem! don't talk of chains and misery; it makes one think of prisons and convicts. Do not allow your mind to dwell upon such dismal things, or you will never be able to shake off your present low spirits."

"And am I not a prisoner. One doomed for life to wear out the remnant of my weary, wretched being, in the dark dungeons of that ruthless tyrant, Love!—the most relentless, obdurate, and vindictive despot that ever cursed our earth."

"Dear Botherem, how suddenly you veer about in your opinions. You said, not half an hour ago, love was the greatest blessing this life could give."

"Oh, prosperous love! But *slighted*!—who shall bear and live?"

"Thousands, and tens of thousands, do every day, Botherem; and yet live—ay, live *seemingly* gay, joyous, and happy—while none would guess them other than they appear."

"It is easy to talk, Esther, but not so easy to act. Had your heart been tortured, torn, lacerated, and broken like mine, you would tell a different tale. Believe me, you would."

"Perhaps we think differently on that point; but take my advice, make a determined effort to shake off this melancholy under which you are now

suffering; and believe me, if you cannot succeed wholly, you will in part."

"I have no power to rouse myself. My spirit is crushed. All seems dreary, blank, and dark. I feel as if a wide abyss was yawning to receive me, into which I must fall, never more to rise! This world has no charms for the wretched, heart-wrung Botherem now! No; life and all its joys are past away!—Sorrow is my portion! I look for naught but misery on this side of the grave! Oh—oh!"

"Well, Botherem, dear, I shall leave you now," said Esther, perceiving his eyelids begin to wink—"no one shall come to disturb you for an hour or two; and I trust by the evening you will be quite well again."

"I do feel sleepy—very sleepy. May it not be the sleep of death creeping over me?" murmured Botherem, closing his eyes, and burying his head comfortably in the midst of his pillow.

"Rather the sleep of brandy-and-water," smiled Esther to herself. "Poor fellow! it will all be right now," continued she, stealing softly to the door, and gently closing it after her; "would that every one in this world could shake off their sorrows as soon as he will. What a strangely constructed mind Botherem's must be," mused his sister. "I will venture to predict that, ere this day month, he will be as gay and happy as ever he was in his life. Well, well, I hardly know if such temperaments are to be envied or not; but I suspect they are. Surely those who think and feel as Botherem does, can have no idea what *real* sorrow is. I must let Miss Murray know how it has all ended, for I am sure she will feel anxious concerning him. She is far too kind-hearted and considerate, to be

wholly indifferent, even about one who has tormented her like our poor Botherem. Her annoyances, I trust, are over for ever from that quarter. When he is once domesticated at Fairborough, he will think no more about Bertha Murray, than if she had never existed. Well, I do think he is to be envied," sighed Esther—"I really do!"

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## CHAPTER XI.

"Do not give way to your feelings in this manner, dear mother," said Augustus Murray, gently raising the head of the weeping Mrs. Darcey from his shoulder, and placing her on a chair; "it quite unmans me to see you so distressed; besides, I don't think it altogether kind in allowing me to leave home under the conviction that I am the cause of so much grief and suffering to those I love so well."

"Dear Augustus, pray do not speak harshly to mamma. She is not well, and this parting is almost too much for her."

"Harshly! Bertha, did I speak harshly? Forgive me, dear mother," continued the young man drawing a chair close to Mrs. Darcey, and throwing his arms affectionately round her neck, while he kissed the fast-falling tears from her pale cheek—"forgive me, dearest mother, if I have uttered one word that sounded unkindly, but really I feel anything rather than happy, this morning. I don't know how it is, I never left home so reluctantly before. I think it is listening to those sad prognostics you

have both been pouring into my ears for these last two hours, that makes me so crusty. But, cheer up! dear mother," cried he, attempting to assume a cheerfulness he was far from feeling, "three short years, as the Scotch girl says to her lover, 'will soon wheel roun', and then you'll have me back again."

"Dear Augustus, you were gone nearly four years last time."

"Well, dear mother, a year more or less, among a number, is no such great matter—say four. What then? I shall only be that much older, and, for aught you know, that much wiser and better—not even to hint at a large stock of gravity I may chance to lay up in the interim. So put all these supposable advantages, likely to accrue to me in the course of those four years, *versus* the disadvantages *not* likely to accrue to you by my absence, and I must say I think my good outbalances your bad."

"Dear Augustus, I have no wish to see you other than you now are," said Mrs. Darcey, smiling through her tears, as she looked, with all a mother's pride, at her noble, handsome son; "bring us but back your own kind affectionate heart unchanged, and those gay happy spirits undamped, and——"

"Stop, stop, dear mother! don't say 'nothing else,' seeing I have a remote kind of notion I shall bring back a wife. What think you? Have you any objection to a nice, sprightly, black-eyed little Spanish damsel, being added to your household?"

"Not if you love her, and she be worthy of your affections, Augustus," replied his sister. "I am sure we should only feel too proud and happy to welcome a wife of yours, let her be what country-woman she may. But, it strikes me, that if I am to wait for a sister-in-law, until I get one in the per-

son of a little black-eyed Spanish Donna, my patience will be sorely tried. No, no, Augustus ; such styles of beauty as Spanish damsels boast, are not at all to *your* taste—at least in the selection of a wife, or my discernment in such matters is sadly at fault."

"Right, quite right, fair sister—they are *not* to my taste. By the way, what did Esther Banks say in that note you told me she sent you yesterday?"

"That she was going to take her brother away into Sussex,"

"What! Is she going with him?"

"Yes ; they are gone."

"When?"

"They started about two hours after I got her note."

"Why did you not tell me so. I very much wished to have seen her again, before I left home," said Augustus, gravely.

"I don't know, dear Augustus, exactly, *why* I did not mention it, but a thought seemed to cross me, it would be better for all parties to say nothing about it."

"Perhaps you were right, Bertha," replied her brother. "It is quite clear Esther Banks has no particular feeling of good will towards me, and I know when once a woman allows herself to take a dislike, it is rather difficult to make her change her opinion ; at all events the doing so must be a work of time. I only grieve that I should have thrown away so many excellent opportunities of gaining her good opinion ; for I candidly confess, I never met a woman more suited to my ideas of what a woman should be, than Esther Banks."

Oh, Esther, couldst thou but have heard those words uttered by the lips of Augustus Murray!

"She certainly is a very superior creature," replied Bertha ; "the friendship of such a woman might not be lightly prized."

"I shall do my best to cultivate her acquaintance," said Mrs. Darcey, "when she returns to Hazelmere, for, from what I have heard of her, I am certain her society would prove a great acquisition, both to Bertha and myself."

"Do, dear mother ; depend upon it, you will be amply rewarded for whatever trouble you may have in seeking her friendship, by the rich treasure she'll prove when once you can succeed in making her shew herself as she really *is*, not as she *appears* to be."

"I don't think Esther Banks is happy."

"I am sure she is not."

"I never knew any person brought up from infancy entirely away from their own family, and then suddenly returned to it, as Esther Banks has been, who was happy. It is wholly impossible they should be ; the thoughts, feelings, actions, affections of those who are separated in early childhood can never be in strict accordance with those they see and know nothing of, until the world has stamped its impressions for good or bad upon the hearts of each. What do they know about the joys or sorrows of her infancy ? what sympathy can they feel for her more than they would for an entire stranger ? and she, poor girl, upon her part, can have few ideas in unison with those who evidently look upon her in the light of an intruder ? Indeed, I think she is to be greatly pitied. I fear she has more to contend with than the world guesses of. It is most mistaken kindness in parents to allow a child, more especially where there is so large a family as Mrs. Banks has, to be taken



away, and brought up entirely among strangers ; nothing but jealousies and discord can be hoped for, should death or any unlooked for accident deprive them of their protector, sending them as an alien among brothers and sisters, who neither love them nor wish for their return."

"I both admire and pity Esther Banks, for I am certain she carries a kind, warm, affectionate heart beneath that cold exterior, and that she is neither happy nor contented, requires very little penetration to discover."

"Right, quite right, Bertha. She is a noble creature ; depend upon it, that those who know her best love her most ; fool as I have been to fritter away time I might so far better have accounted for, I would have given much could I but have seen her before she went."

"Augustus," said Mrs. Darcey, fixing her soft, mild, blue eyes inquiringly upon the animated countenance of her brave, handsome son, "what mean you ?"

"Mean, dear mother," replied the young man, throwing his arms affectionately round her neck, and fondly kissing her cheek again—"you surely cannot blame me for admiring such a woman as Esther Banks ?"

"Blame you, Augustus !—blame you, my dear boy !—oh, no !" cried she, gazing with all a mother's deep, absorbing love, upon him who so well deserved that love—"you never did a thing in the whole course of your life I could censure even in thought, and you cannot imagine I should blame you for doing that which every well-thinking man, gifted with the least share of discernment, *would* do."

"Dear mother, it is well for you I am going away, or I fear I should put your kindness and

affection to a severe trial," said Augustus, earnestly, "by endeavouring to win you over to my cause."

"Neither fear nor trial, Augustus," replied Mrs. Darcey; "if my suspicions accord with your thoughts, so far from that I should be happy, most happy, to see you united to a woman so every way worthy of you."

"Dear mamma, you are really making a grave matter out of nothing," said Bertha, smiling; "you forget Augustus is going abroad for four years, and you know—

‘They tell us, sailors, when away,  
In every port a mistress find.’”

"Hold, hold, Bertha, your quotation is not exactly correct, remember 'tis—

“*They’ll tell thee——*”

"Well," cried his sister, laughing, "I don't see that mends the matter a whit; it all amounts to pretty nearly the same thing, which is neither more nor less than this, wherever a sailor goes, he makes a point of falling fiercely in love with the first fair face he may chance to meet—vows constancy to a dozen at a time—and then thinks it a duty to forget them, one after another, as fast as he can. I would not have a blue-jacket for a sweetheart — no, not——"

"If you never had one at all."

"Exactly; and how mamma can be foolish enough to believe that *any* sailor's love, even for an Esther Banks, could outlive a four years' voyage, is somewhat amazing. The idea—the bare idea," continued she, affecting to be highly amused at the absurdity of such simplicity, "why, mammy, you must really go to school and learn better."

"If all sailors are like Augustus," said his gentle

mother, "we need neither doubt their constancy nor love, and I firmly believe there is as much—nay more, far more—*real* sincerity and honest manly truth to be found in the breasts of sailors than in any other class of men."

"Bravo, dear mother, bravo!—spoken like a true Englishwoman," cried Augustus, exultingly, "you are quite an honour to your sex, and deserve a cheer of nine times nine from every honest tar in the service ; but come, I must be off,—I have not yet taken leave of Mr. Darcey. One more kiss, dear mother. Nay—nay, sweet sister, I really thought you possessed a greater share of firmness and fortitude. Dry your tears, dear Bertha ; I had rather face a cannon's mouth, than be compelled to look at a weeping woman. If I stay much longer, I suppose I shall begin crying out of sheer sympathy—so good-bye once more ! May Heaven bless you both ;" and, straining them in a long, fond, embrace to his bosom, he imprinted a fervent kiss on the cheek of each, and hastily left the room.

"So you must leave us, my dear boy," said Mr. Darcey, looking up from the book that lay before him, as Augustus entered the library—"so you must leave us at last ; I fear it will prove a sad trial to your poor mother ; she is not what she used to be—her health and spirits are both fast failing, and she will feel your loss most severely. I wish you could have stayed with us a little longer ; your company is a great relief to us all, but more especially to myself."

"And yet, dear sir," replied Augustus, smiling, "you have not so often given me an opportunity of profiting by yours as perhaps you might have done."

"True, Augustus, I am indeed a wayward, restless being, and rarely do I act in accordance with the common customs of society. You have had much, very much to put up with from my unhappily capricious temper, and grateful am I for your kindly considerate endurance of those many petty annoyances my uncontrollable irritability has exposed you to. In truth, Murray, I owe you much; what little of cheerfulness I have known for years has been derived from your society; while you are here there is a kind of weighty responsibility removed from me, that at other times presses heavily, most heavily, on my crushed and harassed spirits."

"Pardon me, dear sir, I would not offer uncalled advice, nor intentionally wound your feelings by remarks you may think undutiful, if not impertinent, from one who has ever looked up to, and felt the same regard and affection for you, that a son should feel for a kind and indulgent father; but forgive me if I say, much of the gloom and melancholy under which you are now suffering, and which is not only destroying your health, but rendering you incapable of anything like necessary exertion, requires but a strong effort of the mind, a determined *will* to shake off, which, were you resolutely to make, and which—pardon me, dear sir, for saying—you owe to those around *to make*, how great, how vast would be the change, not only as regards yourself, but to all those whose happiness and welfare you care for!"

While Augustus continued speaking, Mr. Darcey sat with his face buried in his hands, swaying himself to and fro with painful uneasiness; when the voice ceased he looked up, while a harassed, nervous expression was strongly painted on his work-

ing features, and regarding Murray with a fixed, earnest gaze, exclaimed—"No, no; it is too late!" and again relapsed into his former position.

"Indeed, dear father," said the young man, earnestly, "it is never too late to begin a good work; why will you, surrounded by all that is lovely and loving; all that the earth can give of wealth and comfort; all that man can deserve or desire, willingly indulge in an almost misanthropical state of feeling, casting aside every blessing, and giving way to a settled melancholy, that surely none but the base—none but such as have injured and wronged their fellow-men—can or ought to suffer from; but for you, dear sir, whose whole life is one continued series of welldoing, who live but to bestow benefits upon others, whose ear is never deaf to a tale of woe, and whose hand is ever open to relieve the distressed,—surely, surely, there can be *no cause* beyond the indulgence of those feelings, for that deep, settled melancholy which seems to be undermining your health, and making your very existence burdensome."

"And who told you, young man," shouted Mr. Darcey, starting wildly from his chair, and pacing the apartment with a hurried, heavy tread—"who told *you* I have no cause for melancholy? What know you of scenes and actions that took place before you were born. Away! you are impertinent—begone!" continued he, pointing impatiently to the door, "I would be alone! Begone, I say!" repeated he, stamping his foot furiously—"I want no intruders here! away with you!"

"Nay, we part not so, sir," replied Augustus, sadly—"I meant not, believe me, I meant not to vex or wound your feelings, and if I have so done, I earnestly entreat your pardon. You would not

have me leave you in anger? I know the kindness of your heart too well to suppose it for a moment. Farewell, dear sir," said he, warmly and affectionately grasping Mr. Darcey's hand—"farewell, and may Heaven bless you."

"Noble, generous Murray!" exclaimed poor Mr. Darcey, returning the kind pressure of Augustus's hand, and sinking again on his chair, quite overcome by the violence of his momentary excitement, "pardon, pardon me this disgraceful outbreak of passion. Bitter thoughts roused me beyond all power of control. Oh, Murray, Murray! could you but know, could you but guess the load—the terrible load of misery I drag about with me!—dared I but impart the anguish that preys upon my heart, making life itself hateful—indeed you would feel for me! But no, no, it may not be; I have borne my own sorrows too long, to care about imparting them to another. I have borne, and will bear in silence, what could serve no purpose but to bring grief and affliction to those I love, were those sorrows told. One thing that has ever weighed heavily and painfully, added to all I had before to contend with in my misery—that which, alas! I vainly imagined at the time, would lighten my sorrows, bringing something like peace and calm to my tortured heart, but which, most unfortunately for us both, has tended to increase my wretchedness, and heap sadness and suffering on one I loved, as man rarely loves in this world—was my marriage with your gentle mother."

"Dear sir," said Augustus, starting, and looking doubtingly into the face of his agitated companion, "are you speaking the thoughts of your heart? Am I to believe you really mean what you say?"

“ Too truly do I mean what I have just uttered ; would it were otherwise. The misery I have so cruelly brought upon that most amiable of God’s creatures, adds tenfold agony to my wretched heart, as often as I contemplate her wasted beauty, and silent enduring suffering ; her broken spirit, and pale, care-worn brow, and think that, but for me, and all the woe I have heaped upon her, how far other had she been ! Oh ! when I look at her now, and say to myself, ‘ This pale blighted creature is the once gay, happy, beautiful Ellen Romer, and I—I—Heaven have pity on me ! ’ ” groaned he. “ I am like a blast upon all I come near. Oh, that my weary days were ended ! ”

“ Dear, dear father, do not talk so, I beseech of you.”

“ ’Tis useless offering consolation for griefs you cannot even guess at ; it is only probing the wound without hope or chance of cure ; let us say no more about it. I have done wrong, in thus giving way to feeling I ought to have suppressed, more especially at such a time as this. Farewell, dear Murray, we shall never meet again in this world ; I feel too fully assured my days are numbered ; and willingly shall I resign a life of misery, that is daily becoming more insupportable. Once more, farewell, my dear boy ; and if the prayers of one whose supplications avail not himself, may be heard for another, they shall be offered up for thee.”

“ Farewell, dear father,” said Augustus, with deep emotion, again warmly grasping the hand of Mr. Darcey.

“ *Farewell, and for ever,* ” replied he, solemnly.

“ Nay, nay—say not so, dear sir. If I really thought such would be the case, I should indeed leave home with a heavy heart ; but I cannot look

forward with so gloomy a view to the future, as to suppose we may never meet again. I feel convinced when I return, I shall find you not only improved in health, but——”

“Tis a vain hope, then, believe me, Murray. There is neither health nor happiness in store for me. Oh, Augustus!” cried he, again covering his face, while every limb of the wretched man shook with agony, “oh, Augustus! when I remember what I was at your age—when I look at you, and say to myself, *such I have been*—proud in the upright honour of my own heart—gay, happy, courted, sought after, loving the world, and beloved by it, scarcely believing that such things as crime and dishonour could really exist; yes, Augustus Murray, when I look at you, and think that such as you are now, I once was, and then turn to my own withered heart, and blasted existence—then, then, it is, I ——” The rest of the sentence was lost in a low murmuring sound, as the unhappy speaker dropped his head upon his outstretched arms on the table, and sobbed aloud.

“Dear, dear sir! for mercy sake control this terrible emotion. Such bursts of sorrow as these are enough to shake your frame to its very centre. Do not, I earnestly entreat you, allow your feelings to master you in this way; it is fearful to witness.”

“It is past, Murray,” said Mr. Darcey, slowly raising his head; “try and forget you have seen me thus; ’tis rarely I suffer my misery to conquer me in this way, when others are by; but the sight of you at that moment so forcibly recalled to my mind what I was at your age, that the fearful comparison of past and present days was too much for me. My mind is greatly weakened by continued



sufferings, and I cannot so well disguise my feelings as I used to do ; but it is selfish, very selfish, continued he, approaching Augustus, and passing an arm through one of his, “ to embitter the last few minutes you had to stay with me in this way though I know you will forgive me, and make all the allowance your generous nature is capable of for my seeming indifference to the feelings of others, and the almost savage manner in which I have behaved to you—not only this morning, but alas, at many, many other times ! Think of me as one more to be pitied than blamed, as regards the unaccountable waywardness of my almost unbearable temper. Affliction sorely tries even the best and kindest of dispositions. Oh, Murray, could you know——”

“ Hush, hush, dear sir !—I wish to know nothing more of your history than what it has ever pleased you to communicate.”

“ And that is not so much even, as by an imperious duty I ought to have told you. But I am almost grateful now, that, as often as I have been going to lay bare the whole sad tale of my wretched life, either want of resolution, or some other cause, has prevented ; and you now perhaps will never know me for other than I seem.”

“ I could know nothing of you that should lessen my regard, and little that would raise it ; for, believe me when I say, there is not the mortal breathing I esteem and venerate as I do yourself and I am certain, were you *my own* father, I could not regard you with a deeper degree of love and affection than I do.”

“ Thanks, thanks, dear Murray. How little I deserve this ; but I believe you, most sincerely do I believe you. Go, my boy, I will not detain

you longer ; every minute you stay makes me feel the more loath to part from you. I would have given half my wealth, rather than you should have left us now ; but there, again, I shew the miserable selfishness sorrow has brought me to. Why should I wish to mar your bright prospects, and draw you from a profession you are an ornament to, simply because I like to have you near me ? Come, the carriage is at the door, and time flies. Have you taken leave of your mother and sister ?”

“ Yes. I cannot bring myself to take a second farewell. I never parted with them so sadly before. I know ’tis more than foolish thus giving way to unavailing regret ; but I must own I never left home more reluctantly in my life, nor with so heavy a heart.”

“ Yours is not the only heavy heart here, Augustus, believe me. Your poor mother will feel your loss most severely, I know.”

“ I fear she will ; but it is too late now to repent,” said Augustus, endeavouring to smile, though it was *only* an endeavour. “ Go I must,” and once more embracing Mr. Darcey, he sprang into the carriage, and was quickly whirled from that home he was doomed never more to enter.

As our tale is but a simple narrative of facts, and we tell of little beyond that which we have seen with our own eyes, and heard with our own ears, we shall not follow Augustus Murray, even in thought, to distant lands, nor flourish forth for pages, about the fearful dangers of the seas ; fierce battles fought, and glorious victories won ; nor talk of things we neither know nor understand, but leave him to pursue his own bright course untold, till when, returned to his dear native shores, covered with honours, happy in his own honest,

generous, noble heart, and conferring joy and gladness on all around him, he shines like some bright meteor for a short, short while, then sinks—but now we must not anticipate.

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## CHAPTER XII.

“I HAVE been thinking, my love,” said Mrs. Darcey to Bertha, one morning as they sat busying themselves about some of those numerous little elegant employments in which fair ladies take such deep delight and interest, as well they might, for marriage is the otherwise weary hour passed by those gentle beings in the beautiful and useful occupation which fashion and good taste have combined to render indispensable—“I have been thinking, my love, that a visit to my dear and valued friend Mrs. Cleveland Morton, would be of service to you. You have never seen London since you were quite a child; and though I have been constantly urged by all my early friends to let you pass the winter in town with one or the other of them, yet, from that fixed dislike Mr. Darcey has evinced to any proposition of the kind, I have uniformly refused complying with their request—but now he is from home, and your brother away—I fear you will find the approaching winter rather dull, and for that reason——”

“And for that reason, dearest mother, I think it would be exceedingly selfish and unfeeling in me to leave you. No, no, thank you, mamma—I am very contented here; and I should have

enjoyment of all the gaiety with which I am told London abounds, unless you shared those pleasures with me. So, say no more about it, for I will not go."

"Dear Bertha, do not be wilful; it is unlike your usually yielding disposition. Before you positively refuse, let me shew you my reasons for wishing you to accept Mrs. Morton's invitation: and though most assuredly I would not urge you to go, if you have any good reason for objecting, yet I must own, I should feel pleased by your compliance, because——"

"Say not another word, mamma; say not another word; give no reasons. If you really and seriously wish it, that is quite enough to settle the question," said Bertha, affectionately kissing her mother's pale cheek. "I am all obedience, only tell me, mamma, what is to become of you when I am no longer here to take care of you?"

"Do you not think I am almost old enough to take care of myself, dearest?" said Mrs. Darcey, smiling.

"No, indeed, I don't; at least you have never given me reason to think so. You have thought and care for every one but yourself; and I know full well, when I am away, you will fall into those fits of musing and low spirits that so impair your health, making you anything but what you ought to be. *Do not* send me from you, dear mamma," cried the sweet girl, gazing earnestly into the eyes of her gentle mother, while large tears of affectionate love gathered in her own.

"'Every heart knoweth its own sorrows, and a stranger entereth not into its joys,' remember dear Bertha. Oh, how beautiful is every word of scripture, and how deeply do those in affliction feel the

force of their unerring truths. I will not de-  
you, my child, that the increasing melancholy  
abstraction of Mr. Darcey, added to his fas-  
cinating health, is a source of ceaseless anxiety  
agonizing apprehension to me; that there is  
thing weighing upon his mind, he will not in-  
even to me, I am perfectly certain of; and what  
even more dreadful still to witness, is the  
consolation he appears to derive from reli-  
you must often have observed how gloomy  
wretched he has been on his return from ch-  
though when there, his every thought appea-  
be absorbed in the service of his God. Oh, Be-  
believe me there is some fearful mystery conn-  
with my poor husband's early life; some evil  
committed that he dare not tell; some frig-  
story undivulged—there is, there is, I am cer-  
Heaven give us all strength to bear the trial;  
feel but too surely is in store for us! Would I  
the worst; but this state of wretched anxiety—  
terrible suspicions, these alternate doubts  
fears—are more than I can endure. My  
enemy would pity me, could he know the mis-  
suffer!"

"Dear mother, do not weep so bitterly—in-  
do not; it is dreadful to see you in this way  
perhaps, after all, your fears are greater than  
truth. His low spirits may be but the consequ-  
of ill health and bodily suffering, or any-  
rather than that to which you attribute  
Even supposing he does look back to the past  
grief—surely the wrong, let it be what it may,  
not have been done by him; he might have  
sinned *against*, but who can know him as we  
him—for all that is kind, affectionate, generous

noble—and suspect him of deeds such as you seem to dread him guilty of? No, no, dear mother; could you but induce him to impart his sorrow to you, all would be well—trust me it would!”

“Ah, Bertha, could I but think so, how much of misery had I been spared! The fearful feeling—nay, I say *conviction*—that some heavy affliction is impending over us; some tale that will crush our hearts to hear, but which must be told ere long, sits like an incubus on my spirits, destroying my health, and making even life itself wearisome. But let us talk of your visit, love; I am not equal to pursue this torturing subject further now—I would fain escape from myself and sad thoughts for a few minutes, if possible. I will tell you why I wish you to go rather earlier than I otherwise should have done. Miss Bridgenorth has written to say she is coming to spend a week at Darcey Hall; she will be here on Monday, and I know she would be delighted to take you back to town with her. As you are aware I cannot go myself, and I should not like your travelling so far alone, I think it an excellent opportunity for you to accompany her; she is one of the most intimate friends Mrs. Morton has, and I know nothing that would please the dear, kind little creature better than having the important duty imposed on her, of assisting Mrs. Morton to ‘introduce’ you. What say you, Bertha, to my arrangement,—will you go, dearest?”

“Certainly, mamma, as I see you have quite set your mind on my so doing; but, pray tell me what is to become of yourself in the meantime. You surely do not intend living here all alone, through the dreary winter months; it would throw you into a low nervous fever—indeed it would.”

"Stop, stop, Bertha; not so fast. I have no intention of remaining even a week after you leave me; I shall join your father in Germany."

"What, dear mamma!"

"Yes, indeed, you may well feel astonished though such is my present intention."

"But how do you know Mr. Darcey wishes it?"

"I know perfectly well he does, or believe me, dearest, I should not venture upon such a step. Doctor Latimer writes me that your father is continually asking him if he thought I would object coming so far, and then begins talking to himself about how much he wishes to see me, but that I do not deserve any kindness from one he has so deeply injured. Oh!" exclaimed she, "if I could but guess how truly, how devotedly, I love him, would he doubt me thus!"

"And will you really go, mamma?"

"Go! yes, Bertha; and grateful—most grateful am I to have an opportunity of shewing him that even his slightest wish is joyfully obeyed."

"But how will you get there?"

"Very easily; I am not so bad a traveller as you appear to imagine, dear Bertha."

"No, I know you are not a bad traveller; yet I can't bear the idea of your going so far alone."

"I am *not* going alone, love; I shall take Benso with me. She is one of the best voyagers I ever met with. You know she went with me to India and most serviceable I found her. Indeed, I don't know what we should have done without her; she is a most valuable creature."

"Well, I am glad you are going to take her, mamma; but still——"

"Still what, dearest? more scruples! I begin to suspect you want to dissuade me from going."

altogether; come, be honest, Bertha, is not that what you are aiming at?"

"No, indeed, indeed, mamma, it is not; only it seems so dreadful to me, the idea of two unprotected women travelling such a distance alone; I am sure I should die with terror long before I got to my journey's end."

"No, Bertha, you would not; that is, if you but allowed yourself to reason deliberately and coolly about the matter. My opinion is, that a woman may travel alone, ay, *quite alone*, all over Europe, and not meet with one single insult, or even annoyance. It wholly depends upon herself; men, even the lowest and worst, will treat a woman with respect and kindness, when they see her alone and unprotected, that is, if she conducts herself with propriety. I am convinced there is a kind of chivalric spirit implanted in the breasts of all men, even to the most humble, that would prompt them, at all times, and under all circumstances, to render a woman assistance if they saw she needed it."

"Well, I dare say you are right, mamma, but still I cannot divest myself of the notion, that travelling so far, without any one to whom you could turn for protection and advice, must be a terrible trial to one so gentle and retiring as you are."

"Well, dear child, as you seem to have so great a horror of the thing, I trust it may never be your fate to be placed in such situations as I have been, though I can assure you, from personal knowledge, that your terrors are wholly unfounded. When I returned from India, after your poor father's death, with Augustus and yourself, who were mere infants at the time, I am sure, had every one on board been my nearest relations and dearest friends, they could not have behaved to me with greater kind-



ness and attention, each striving to outdo the other, in good offices, affection, and sympathy.

"Yes, I don't doubt that, mamma; but it is not every woman who is blessed with your sweet, winning ways."

"It never struck me there was anything particularly *winning* about my manner, dearest; but if I must confess, I fear I am far too silent and reserved to be even pleasing."

"But you were not always so reserved as you are now, dear mother," said Bertha, earnestly. "I have often told me that *once* you were the gayest of the family, and that even dulness itself must shake its gloom when you were present."

"Dear, kind-hearted Hetty; she has a heart as the Turks say, and fancies every one who loves is perfection."

"She is a dear, affectionate, good little soul, and shall be so delighted when she comes."

"So shall I; she is the most amusing companion I ever met with; even her very blunders and odd mistakes, serve but to make her goodness of heart more conspicuous, for who did she injure by any of her little inadvertences? but the moment she discovered herself to be wrong she was miserable until she could load the suffering party with benefits and favours, apologies and humble entreaties for pardon; no one can know her intimately and well, but must love and revere her. I am certain you will find her a most invaluable companion when Mrs. Morton cannot accompany you; she is a perfect book of reference—helping everybody and everything."

"Is Mrs. Morton young or old?"

"Why, as compared with myself, *young*, certainly, though you will not think her so; girls of eighteen rarely look upon a woman of four

thirty in any other light than that of an elderly person, even should she be as pretty, light-hearted, cheerful and fascinating as my charming friend, Mrs. Cleveland Morton."

"Indeed, mamma, if she is only half what you describe her I shall not quarrel with her on the score of age, depend upon it. How long has she been a widow?"

"Sixteen years."

"Dear me! why, how young she must have been married!"

"A mere girl; Mr. Morton was a man much, very much older than herself,—enormously rich. I am afraid poor Matilda had no voice in the matter; it was considered a splendid match for her, and she was scarcely consulted about it; however, it so chanced, they lived most happily together. Mr. Cleveland Morton was a very amiable, good man, and absolutely idolized his young wife, as well he might, for surely never existed a sweeter creature than Matilda St. Clare; and fully did she return his affections.

"It is all nonsense to say disproportionate marriages are never happy ones; I know several instances to the contrary; it is not in woman's nature to repel and treat with indifference such devoted love and kindness as a man who marries a woman much younger than himself invariably lavishes upon her. Gratitude, common gratitude, must compel her to look with respect upon a husband who makes his wife's happiness the sole study of his life; gratitude soon ripens into affection, and affection into love. That love is always the most lasting which is based upon gratitude and esteem; look, for instance, at Mr. and Mrs. Loader; can anything exceed the happiness of those two people?"

"Exactly, mamma ; that is just what I was going to say, and yet there are evil tongues who hint, they are not so happy as they would wish the world to imagine."

"I know to the contrary, Bertha ; and when you have lived as long as I have, dearest, you will treat all scandalous reports with the scorn and abhorrence I do. No good or well-disposed person could take pleasure in inventing and spreading stories that are told for the express purpose of injuring others, and those others, perhaps, the very last people in the world who would be guilty of the offences laid to their charge.

"There are very few things, or persons, I can accuse myself of disliking ; but if there is one thing in the world I condemn more than another, it is an evil speaker. When once a person gives way to a relish for scandal, they can never be trusted again ; the pleasure of having a good story to tell blinds them to the mischief, nay, misery, they may be working to innocent, unoffending families, who, so far, perhaps, from deserving the ill that is said of them, are wholly unconscious of having done the least thing that could bring down censure or unkindly feelings upon them. I once knew a distressing instance of the kind, where a whole family, of as amiable, excellent, worthy people, as ever existed, were driven from their home, and the town, in which for years they had lived happy and respected, through the malignity of a wretch, who one of the members, by some unfortunate mistake or other, had unintentionally offended. Strange hints were given ; disreputable rumours got abroad ; friends grew cool, tradespeople uncivil, and at last, though wholly unable to account for the extraordinary and distressing alteration in the manners of those with whom for years they had lived on terms of friend-

ship and good feeling, they were compelled to leave their native place, with sad and sorrowing hearts, and it was not until long, long after they had settled in a distant county, far from the home of their happy childhood, that the slanderer, with the true cause of his malice, was discovered ; then, when it was too late, people began to wonder how they could ever have been so foolishly blind, as not to see through such wicked fabrications, and set themselves strenuously to undo the mischief their easy credulity had wrought, by proffers of renewed friendship, and earnest entreaties to return. But all this was small recompence for the misery that had been inflicted, and they resolved never more to hold fellowship with those who could allow themselves to be led away by spiteful and malignant tongues, to look with suspicion, and treat as criminals, friends who had never, by thought, word, or deed, given cause of offence to a human being."

"Indeed, mamma, you have good reason for disliking slanderers—they are a hateful race! and I never hear people speaking illnaturally about others, without thinking of the twenty-eighth chapter of Ecclesiasticus."

"True, dearest ; your thoughts meet mine exactly there. Many is the time I have had it on my tongue to ask those who I have heard vilifying innocent people, with no other motive, that I could discover, than that of having a good story to tell, if they had ever read it."

"Were I Cadi for a day," said Bertha, laughing, "I would enact a law, under which all tale-bearing, spiteful-speaking, malicious-talking, slander-inventing folk, should be severely punished."

"And pray what may be your notions of adequate justice, as the penalty of those offences?"

"If the transgressor were a woman, she should

be condemned to total silence for twelve entire calendar months ; if a man, he should be compelled to talk, without ceasing, for that precise space of time."

"Now, do you know, Bertha, it strikes me your punishment would prove extremely unequal."

"How so, mamma?"

"Because, I am afraid the woman's suffering would be greater than the man's."

"Well, now, I don't see that at all."

"Yes, indeed ; there are many men who are great talkers by nature, extremely fond of hearing their own voices, and will make speeches whether they are called for or not ; to such, I don't imagine your sentence would prove a punishment ; but for a woman to be doomed to twelve months' of hopeless silence I suspect would be almost more than could be borne."

"Just allow me to correct you a trifle or so in this matter, mamma ; that there are many men who will talk, and talk till people become tired of listening to them, I am most ready to admit ; but, then, have the goodness to remember their eloquence is to please *themselves*. *Compel* those self-same orators to speak against their own sovereign wills, and then think how terrible would be the infliction. So you see, mamma, that should there be any inequality of punishment, it would fall heaviest on those who ought to be the best able to bear it. Am I not right?"

"A perfect Solon, doubtless ! But come, love, I am wasting time that ought to be otherwise employed ; I must write to Doctor Latimer before the next post goes out."

"Dear mamma, will you grant me one favour?"

"Certainly, dearest ; what is it?"

"Ask Doctor Latimer to come and meet you ; I

cannot endure the thoughts of your travelling so far wholly unprotected, and I am sure our kind old friend would be delighted at having an opportunity of rendering you a personal service. Do oblige me, mamma, will you?"

"Without the slightest hesitation, love, and thank you for the suggestion. I do not understand German very perfectly, and as I know Doctor Latimer is a complete master of the language, his superior knowledge will be of great service to me."

"Thank you, mamma; you cannot tell what a relief it will be to my mind, to know you have some one near you who is able and willing to render advice and assistance if required. I should have been perfectly miserable at the idea of your wandering alone in a foreign country, with no one to take care of you but an old woman."

"Dear child, you really do magnify those dangers likely to be met with in a journey from Darcey Hall to the banks of the beautiful Rhine a thousand times! You see difficulties where I can see none, though I must own the pleasure of dear old Doctor Latimer's company will be every way desirable, and 'tis odd I should not have thought of asking him to meet me until you put the idea into my head, and decidedly a very good idea it is too, love."

"When do you think of going, mamma?"

"Oh, not until after you leave for town, dear, which, I imagine, will be about a fortnight from this time."

"How much more delightful would my visit prove could you be with me, dear mamma."

"I differ from you, Bertha; my present feelings are in no state either to give or receive pleasure from the gaieties of such a life as fashionable people lead in London; a continued round of company and visiting would harass me to death; and, I as-

sure you, so far from increasing your enjoyment, I should be quite a drawback upon all your amusements."

"Dear mamma, do not say so, wherever you are, there you know I am always contented and happy; indeed, I have been so wholly unaccustomed to anything like the bustle and business of gay life, that I am terribly afraid I shall play but a frightened and awkward part in the grand scene. I more than half wish you had not made up your mind to send me."

"Never mind, love; I shall consign you into good and safe keeping, where I know all things will be made smooth and pleasant for you, so you need have no fears; I shall feel as perfectly secure of your happiness while under Mrs. Cleveland Morton's protection, as if you were under my own, nay, more so, for she is one of the gayest, most light-hearted, charming companions I ever met with, while I am but ——"

"The dearest, kindest, best of mothers, a loving daughter ever possessed!" cried Bertha, earnestly; "and I love your sweet, sad smile better than the gayest laugh that ever rang upon my ear, dear mother," said the affectionate girl, imprinting a kiss on Mrs. Darcey's cheek; "I wish sincerely you would let me ——"

"Nay, nay, Bertha," replied the gentle mother, returning her fair child's warm embrace, "that matter is *quite* settled; so to prevent all further argument upon the subject, I shall leave you, and go write to Doctor Latimer, fixing the time when and where to meet me."

"Mind you tell him to come almost home, mamma."

"Very well, love," said Mrs. Darcey, as she left the room, "your orders shall be obeyed."

## CHAPTER XIII.

"Who is that beautiful syren at the piano?" said the handsome, rich, Sir Felix Greyling to his friend, Colonel Arburthnott.

"Had you asked me *what* she was, I could easily have answered your question, by saying an *angel*! but as to the *who*, whence she came, what's her name, where are her father and mother, or the amount of her brothers and sisters, I know no more than the Grand Khan of Tartary; all I *do* know is that she's the most beautiful creature, without one single exception, I ever beheld in the whole course of my life."

"Has she been here long?"

"That's more than I can tell; I was arrested in my progress across the room by a voice, such as mortal never heard before, and here have I been standing entranced a full half hour, drinking in deep draughts of love and melody, I fear to my undoing."

"Do be rational, Arburthnott, if you can for once, and tell me——"

"Ay, *if I can*, that is well put in; I have never been particularly noted for the rationality of my proceedings, and if I prove anything but an irrationale being, for the next ten years at least, it will be something to wonder at."

"Do you know who she came with?"

"Not I! I have already told you she was seated at the piano when I arrived, therefore I can give you no further information concerning her; though thus far I may and will enlighten you. I saw Mrs. Cleveland Morton speaking to her just now, with



anything but the manner and look of an acquaintance of to-day ; I should say, if I guess rightly, they came together."

"What, *young* Mrs. Cleveland Morton?"

"Yes, *young* Mrs. Cleveland Morton ; but prithee, my dear fellow, do go and bestow the benefit of your catechism upon some more intelligent and communicative mortal than my uninformed self ; for of a truth you have been boring me to death with questions which you know as well I do I have no means of answering correctly, and besides, to be honest, I think you are doing me great wrong, by putting to flight a thousand bright visions and fancy dreams, that were coming thick and fast upon me, when you awoke me from my trance of love and adoration."

"Do you mean to ask for an introduction?"

"What, to dance with her? Why, man, I should just as soon think of tying a red-hot coal in the corner of this cambric pocket-handkerchief, and placing it in my bosom, as to touch the hand of yonder enchantress to-night ; I am all on fire as it is, and can't run the risk of being calcined outright ; no, no, 'twill take a week at least before I can venture that much."

"Look, look ! there is Mrs. Morton," exclaimed Sir Felix ; "I must go and get her to introduce me." So saying, he darted across the room, and seizing on the astonished lady, dragged her, without preface or apology, to the place where Bertha, who had risen from the piano, despite the earnest entreaties of those around her for another song, stood looking anxiously and timidly about for her friend.

So immediate was the capture, and so sudden the transition, that had it not been for the words "introduce me," muttered rather than spoken into her

ear, in the course of their flight, poor Mrs. Morton, with all her tact and woman's wit, would have been utterly at a loss to comprehend the meaning of such an extraordinary proceeding on the part of her usually calm and somewhat stately friend; but those two simple words were to her, as the glass to the mariner, the microscope to the man of science, making far and indistinct things clear and visible; so, banishing by an instantaneous effort all appearance of surprise or curiosity from her pretty, smiling face, she passed one hand through an arm of Sir Felix, and taking the taper fingers of Bertha in the other, said, "I fear, my love, you have over-exerted yourself; you look pale and fatigued."

"No, dear Mrs. Morton, not in the least, but the room is warm, and I am so wholly unaccustomed to a crowd, that I began to be apprehensive lest I had lost you in the throng, and was just weighing in my own mind the possibility of threading my way through this glittering assembly in search of you, when I saw you approaching; and now you are by me, my fears are all at rest."

"When you have served as long an apprenticeship to crowded rooms and glittering throngs as I have, dear Bertha, you will find no more difficulty in steering a clear course to any wished-for point, let the crowd be ever so dense, than you now do in traversing the quiet walks at Darcey Hall, to reach your own beautiful little summer-house, that Miss Bridgenorth so rapturously lauds."

"I fear I shall prove less apt than you seem willing to suppose me," replied Bertha, smiling.

"Everything is to be learnt, and few are so dull but that by a continued course of tuition, and close application on the student's part, mysteries the most deep and profound may be solved, and ren-

dered comparatively easy ; so I do not despair of some day seeing you *tout-à-fait* at that which now frightens and bewilders you."

"Well, dear Mrs. Morton, I will do my best to render myself deserving of the high opinion you seem determined to entertain of me. But still I have my doubts as to the result."

"Well, well, Bertha," replied her lively friend, "time will shew. You know there are no wonders in this world that time can't achieve, so I trust to the old mower, and my confidence will not be misplaced. But, come, do you feel disposed to dance?"

"Not just yet ; I had rather wait a set or two."

"As you please, dear. Perhaps you will allow me to introduce my friend, Sir Felix Greyling?"

Bertha bowed, and smiled, and was in the act of accepting Sir Felix's proffered arm, when a thick, plethoric voice exclaimed, "I trust, Miss Murray, you have not forgotten your engagement to me?" And, as the voice ceased, a very rotund person bustled forward, and, presenting an exceedingly plump arm, reminded Bertha that waltzing had begun.

"I was not aware you were engaged, dear," said Mrs. Morton.

"I had quite forgotten it. I really beg your pardon, Lord Frampton, but——"

"Oh, never mind—never mind," wheezed out the puffy lord, "I'm not at all offended ; but you know no one likes being overlooked. However, the least said is soonest mended ; so come, Miss Murray, if you please, I'm all ready," saying which, he grasped poor Bertha tightly round the waist, and, dragging her forward, commenced a series of

evolutions, which he, in the pride and simplicity of his heart, called *waltzing*!

Why will short, spherical, gentlemen *attempt* to waltz? They never *succeed*.

By the time Sir Felix Greyling had relieved himself of some half-dozen hurried, and exceedingly incoherent interrogatives, concerning Mrs. Morton's beautiful young friend, the fair girl returned to where they were standing, having succeeded in shaking off her weighty partner's ponderous arm, and, under plea of fatigue, requested permission to return to her friend.

"Oh, yes! I dare say you are monstrously tired, Miss Murray," grumbled out Lord Frampton, wiping his heated face and damp hair all over, with a very large bandanna handkerchief. "'Tis hot, certainly, and ladies much sooner get fatigued than we do; but still, for all that, I venture to say, should *somebody*, that shall be nameless, ask you to dance, you'd forget all about this wonderful weariness!" and the rude man winked, as if he were very knowing indeed.

Bertha blushed scarlet. Sir Felix bit his lip hard; and Mrs. Morton looked as if she could have annihilated the creature.

"There now, Mrs. Cleveland Morton, don't try to look angry and innocent at the same time, because you very well understand who, and what I mean. I can see clear enough you want to shake me off, as Miss Murray did, a minute ago, but I'm not going to stand that, I can tell you. One's as good as another; and if Miss Murray is well enough to dance with Sir Felix Greyling, I don't understand——"

"Sir," said Sir Felix, drawing himself up, and

fixing his magnificent eyes full upon the face of his fat tormenter, "when your opinion is asked upon the subject, perhaps you will give it; *till then*, keep those remarks to yourself—they are both offensive and uncalled for."

It was as good as a comedy to see the vulgar lord shrink away. Few could stand the blaze of Sir Felix Greyling's splendid eyes, when roused to anger, unmoved—and least of all could Lord Francis Frampton. The thing appeared actually to recoil beneath Sir Felix's look, and, giving one deep grunt, while he dapped his wet forehead with redoubled ardour, the discomfited peer trundled out of the room, and was no more seen that evening.

"I am glad he is gone," said Mrs. Morton; "he certainly is, without any exception, the most disagreeable man I know."

"I think I never met with so odd-looking, and strangely-behaved a person before," observed Bertha.

"Very," said Sir Felix Greyling. "Do you like him, Miss Murray?"

"*Like him!*" ejaculated Bertha, in the utmost surprise. "I don't understand you."

Mrs. Morton smiled.

"No, no—I beg your pardon, Miss Murray—I mean are you related?"

Mrs. Morton laughed outright.

"Dear me! what have I said? I really—that is—I——"

"Had you not better stand up for the next quadrille, Bertha?" said Mrs. Morton, vainly endeavouring to look grave, though almost convulsed with laughter; "the sets are filling rapidly."

"I had rather wait."

"Exactly. You are quite right, Miss Murray;

the rooms will get cooler before long, and it would grieve me exceedingly to see you suffering from fatigue and——”

Here Sir Felix made a full stop.

Mrs. Morton glanced at Bertha, to try if she could discover what kind of impression the extraordinarily bewildered manner, and incomprehensible conversation of Sir Felix Greyling was making on the mind of her friend; and certainly, if ever a fair face looked puzzled, amazed, perplexed, and confounded, Bertha Murray's was that fair face. She appeared quite at a loss to comprehend what manner of man she was speaking to and cast an appealing look towards Mrs. Morton, which said, as plainly as looks could say, “Take him away, I am afraid of him.” But Mrs. Morton felt not in the least disposed to understand those signals of distress—nay, *au contraire*, she appeared so highly amused at all that was going on, that poor Bertha wished from the bottom of her heart there was no such things as handsome men, and splendid parties in the world, resolving, with a determination, she felt assured, in her own mind, nothing could induce her to break, that, as this was the *first*, so it should be the *last*, ay, *very* last, thing like a party she would ever be prevailed upon to appear at again.

The pause had lasted for several minutes, during which time Sir Felix Greyling was hopelessly endeavouring to arrange his bewildered thoughts, and put his intended speeches into something like a comprehensible form, and was just flattering himself with the notion that he had sufficiently mastered his feeling, and overcome the painfully nervous agitation which seized him on his first introduction, when a simple observation from Bertha, uttered in that peculiarly low, soft, melodious tone, which be-

longed to her, and her alone—for no other voice in the world was ever half so sweet—scattered all his coherency far abroad, sending the blood, with a sudden rush, from his heart to his face, and back again in an instant, leaving him almost ghastly pale. Poor Sir Felix! even the merry little widow forgot her mirth for a moment, and tried to bring him back to himself, by drawing him into conversation about indifferent matters; but no, all attempts of the kind failed, and she soon saw that “Richard was not himself,” and nothing would make him, for that evening at least.

“Come, my love,” said she, turning to Bertha, “if you intend dancing at all, you must really stand up in the next set. It is getting late, and I wish to return home before twelve o’clock.”

While Mrs. Morton was by, things were not quite so desperate, but when she left them, with a look of meaning enjoyment dimpling her pretty face, as much as to say, “Do without me if you can,” then it was their real trials began in earnest.

Bertha tried to argue herself into a conviction that it must be wholly impossible Mrs. Morton would purposely leave her in the charge of a deranged man; though how to account for his marvellously singular behaviour, but by setting it down to aberration of intellect, was entirely past her power to determine; while Sir Felix, on his part, felt so keenly the ridiculous impression he must be making on the mind of his beautiful partner, that every effort he made to conduct himself with even common propriety, only served to increase his dilemma; and, though feeling as if he could fall on his knees before the lovely being who stood at his side, and worship her, yet to such a height had his

misery got, by the total absence of all self-possession, that, more than once, the thought crossed him, as his eye fell upon an opposite window, that had been partly opened for the purpose of admitting air, how superlatively happy it would make him, could he but throw it wide open, and jump out into the street.

"Did you say you would dance, Miss Murray?" said he, abruptly, turning suddenly round, so as to place himself immediately in front of his partner—"I thought I understood you so."

"Certainly. Have we not taken our places for that purpose?"

"Oh, yes, certainly—I beg your pardon; but perhaps you prefer waltzing?"

"No, I thank you. Besides, we could not waltz very well now; for, if you observe, they are playing quadrille music."

"Ah, to be sure! I did not observe it though. Is it not our turn to begin?"

"No, we are at the side."

"Ah, yes! exactly. I was thinking we were at the top—the bottom, I mean. Have you been staying long in town, Miss Murray?"

"About a week."

"About a week. Oh, indeed!"

And here the business of the dance demanding their attention, a long pause ensued, which was at length broken by Sir Felix, who said in a tone a little—a very little—more composed than when he last spoke—

"You are staying with Mrs. Cleveland Morton, are you not, Miss Murray?"

"Yes."

"You remain until the season is over, I hope—that is, I trust—I—I mean——"



"The length of my visit entirely depends upon circumstances. It rests with others, rather than myself, whether it shall be long or short."

"Indeed. How so?"

"Oh, various reasons, that are wholly domestic, render my stay in town——"

"I beg a thousand pardons, Miss Murray! You must really think me the most impertinent man possible; but, believe me, I had not the slightest intention of—of— Had you not better sit down?"

"I doubt if that would be exactly polite to our *vis-d-vis*," replied Bertha, smiling.

"Why not?"

"Because I very much doubt if they could finish the quadrille without us."

"Precisely. I did not think of that. Do you like London, Miss Murray?"

"Not to reside in, certainly; but what I have seen of it I admire exceedingly. Some of the buildings I think magnificent."

"You have been to the opera, of course?"

"I thought it was not yet open."

At this moment the last bar of *la finale* was struck, and each gentleman bowing to his partner, presented an arm, and commenced that grave and stately tour, which puts one so monstrously in mind of a parish funeral, all acting, and no feeling.

The whole entire fifteen couples had passed in review, yet still there stood Sir Felix, to all appearance most deeply absorbed in contemplating a rather considerable fracture he, by some strange inadvertency or other, had produced in the back of his glove.

"In the name of goodness," thought Bertha, "what does the man mean to do? Am I to stand here all night to be stared at? I wish he would

run away and leave me ; I could manage a great deal better without him."

As these very complimentary ideas were passing in fair Bertha's brain, she beheld Mrs. Morton approaching, leaning on the arm of a very tall, handsome man, and, quite forgetting for the moment all established rules about etiquette, she joyfully sprang forward to meet her.

"Are you ready to go, love?"

"Oh, yes, yes! *quite* ready."

"Allow me to introduce Lord Delamere to you, Bertha—Miss Murray, Lord Delamere."

"Bertha, as in duty bound, bowed and smiled. Lord Delamere, *not* in duty bound, bowed and stared.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Morton, looking suddenly round, "where is Sir Felix Greyling?"

"Gone!" laughed Lord Delamere.

"Gone! What, without waiting to see us to our carriage! How very extraordinary."

"Not extraordinary at all, Mrs. Morton; extremely kind, I think. He has left me to perform that pleasing office, which I flatter myself I can do as well, if not better. May I be permitted the honour?" continued he, presenting his arm to Bertha.

"Well, if you are sure he is gone, there is no use waiting any longer," said Mrs. Morton; "but I'm determined to give him a good scolding next time I see him, for his very uncivil behaviour."

"Aha, aha!" laughed Lord Delamere. "Poor Greyling, I quite feel for him."

By this time the carriage had been summoned, and his lordship having seen them safely seated, called for his own cab, and departed likewise.

"Alas, for poor Sir Felix Greyling!" said Colonel

Arburthnott, emerging from the corner in which he had ensconced himself, to watch proceedings. "Alas! for poor Sir Felix Greyling," said the gay Colonel to himself; "he's done for. Well, wish him all success; and truly 'tis no bad joke to see the hitherto invulnerable Sir Felix Greyling so deeply wounded at last; she certainly is a wonderful creature, and I'm not quite sure but I shall enter the lists with him, though, truth to tell, I fear the chances would be twenty to one against me. Greyling is not a man to sue, and be repulsed by any woman living. There's Delamere; I have my doubts about him; however, we shall see! we shall see! But if Greyling be not the favourite—if he don't carry off the prize despite us all, I have no divination in such matters. What a lovely creature she is; I'm sure I shall dream of her all night; everything seems dull and stupid now she's gone. 'Pon my soul, I never beheld her equal! I wonder where she came from!"

"Where *who* came from, my dear Colonel?" said Lady Hawkley. "Why, you seem like one entranced; it's bad enough to hear an old person talking to himself, but to see the gay, gallant Colonel Arburthnott turned into an acco, is rather too much of a good thing."

"I really beg your ladyship's pardon; but I assure you I was wholly unconscious of having committed so flagrant a breach of propriety."

"Ah! there it is, to be sure; no one would accuse you of talking aloud to yourself, if you knew it. 'Tis precisely because you *don't* know it, that I wish to call you to order."

"Thank you, my dear lady; I am much beholden to you, but I fear your kindness is totally thrown away upon me, just now. I have a few

Crotchets in my head, that must be driven forth ere I can listen to reason ; and as I am fully aware my company will prove anything but desirable at this precise moment, I cannot do you a greater service than by wishing you good night ;" saying which, without waiting for a reply, he buttoned up his coat, and left the room.

" Bless us, and save us !" exclaimed the discomfited Dowager ; " what has come to all the men ? They seem perfectly bewitched this evening ; first of all there was Lord Frampton run against me, and almost knocked me down, without taking the least notice, or offering anything like an apology ; then there was Sir Felix Greyling rushed by me, and tore down stairs like one distraught, banging the street door after him, as if he wanted to shake the house down ; and now here's Colonel Arburthnott, talking to himself about *her* and *she*. Oh, that's it ! I've found it all out ; *of course, that's it ;*" and away trotted the old dame to irradiate some crony not quite so sapient as herself, with this new light that had just burst upon her.

" Dolt, idiot, fool that I am !" exclaimed Sir Felix Greyling, fastening his chamber-door with the determination of one who has resolved that his meditations shall not be disturbed, even by his valet ; " dolt, idiot, fool, what—what must *she* think of me ? Oh ! I could beat myself for my own folly—and yet I am quite certain, were the evening to come over again, I should behave just as ridiculously. I'll call on Mrs. Morton the first thing in the morning. I shall never know a moment's peace until—until——

" What a fool I have been—how perfectly lovely she is—that voice—that sweet, sweet voice ; was ever anything in this world heard like it before ?

Woman! Angel! what an absurd creature must think me;—how could I have acted and yet I hardly knew what I was doing. I will see her in the morning. Beautiful—ful creature!"

"I wonder," said Bertha, as she laid her head on her pillow that night, "if all fashionable men are like Lord Frampton and Sir Felix Greyling. If they *are*, I'm sure our country are of a very superior order; and yet it is right to speak of the elegant Sir Felix and vulgar Lord Frampton together. I wonder made him behave so strangely? He is splendidly handsome. How frightened lordship looked, when he fixed those supercilious eyes upon him! what a round, rude, ugly thing and fair Bertha laughed to herself at the recollection of his absurd figure while *attempting* to—" Sir Felix Greyling, I do think, is almost as handsome as Augustus—perhaps *some* people call him the finest man of the two. I should like to see him again, just to find out if he always appears so odd—nothing else—for I am sure I could never like him—and yet I don't know. What a sweet, deep, rich, low voice he had when he was calling to mind without an effort the exact tone of that low, sweet voice, she fell asleep, and dreamed a vast deal about men's voices that turned to roars; then she heard some one singing an unintelligible song, the only words of which she could make were, "I beg your pardon; dear me, what did you say? Ah, yes! just so, exactly;" then, in a sudden, she found herself dancing with a man, that somebody called Daniel Lambert; here poor Bertha was sorely puzzled in her "Bless me!" thought she, "why, surely v

was not in fashion when Mr. Lambert went to school, or if it was, he could never have learned, for he don't seem to know much about it." While this perplexity worried the fair sleeper, an immense red silk pocket-handkerchief came flapping before her eyes—then, when this extravagant waste of stuff, with its *gros* owner departed, the sweet, but strange music, began again; and so she went on dreaming an immensity more, all amounting to the same thing, until, when opening her bright eyes next morning, fair Bertha burst out into a merry laugh, exclaiming—

"Well, then, I haven't been waltzing with Daniel Lambert, and *he* didn't sing."

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#### CHAPTER XIV.

"PERMIT me, Miss Murray, to congratulate you upon your last night's conquest. You have, in the inconceivably short space of three hours, achieved a victory, and bound in chains a monstrous rebel to the throne of love; one who, for years, has withstood the arts, wiles, and swift-winged arrows of Dan Cupid; one, against whom the whole united force of beauty, youth, and wealth, has vainly raised its all-powerful standard, only to be driven back with defeat and loss; one, whose flinty heart, and cold disdainful bearing, has forced many a match-seeking mamma, and rich manœuvring widow, to their wit's ends, to say nothing of the thousand and odd pretty damsels, who have tried, and vainly tried, (using all the known weapons in the warfare

of love,) to storm the stronghold of this Saracen, and take captive his rebellious head.

"In the name of goodness, my dear Mr. Morton, of whom are you speaking? How, where, has this huge traitor, this hitherto invincible giant, this all-powerful and unconquerable conqueror, been taken captive, and brought in to sue for that mercy he has so long denied others?"

"Nay, fair Bertha, seek not that knowledge of me, ask it rather of thy own heart. Surprised cannot so soon have forgotten the handsome Felix Greyling, to whom I introduced you at Malcolm's last night."

"What, the tall, pale man, with the long lashes, who behaved so oddly? I declare I never met with so strange a being in my life before."

"Strange! In what way was he strange?" demanded Mrs. Morton, laughing.

"I do not know what you may think of him, but I began to be absolutely frightened! He spoke so incoherently, and looked so bewildered, I felt it was quite a relief to get away from him."

"Humph! that is as it may be. I consider myself far too well bred, to make a practice of openly differing in opinion; but if ever I am disposed to forget my politeness, it would be at this present moment. As to his behaving so odd, what *etrange*, I will not positively deny *toto*; and he certainly never did appear to my disadvantage; but I can make large allowance for him. Powerful causes, you know, produce powerful effects."

"There must have been some *very* powerful cause in operation last night, for he appeared to know in the least what he was either sa-

doing. He asked me a dozen questions in a breath—waited for no answer—dropped into dead silence—talked on again—contradicted himself—stared me full in the face—and then, in the most abrupt manner possible, wished me good *morning*, and darted out of the room."

"Never mind, love," said Mrs. Morton, laughing heartily at Bertha's droll, though really correct description of her last evening's partner—"never mind, love, I think I may venture to promise he will behave better at your next meeting. Don't judge him harshly; and be sure, if you would not risk her highest displeasure, you say no word in his dispraise to Miss Bridgenorth; she is absolutely wrapped up in him."

"Oh! false, false! faithless Hetty! Has she already found a new love? Why, I thought Augustus stood on the very tip-top step of the ladder of her affections," said Bertha, gaily, rather glad the conversation appeared to be taking a turn. "Has she really forgotten her 'handsome sailor,' as she calls Augustus, so very soon?"

"No, no, she has not forgotten him; but Sir Felix Greyling is no recent attachment. Why, she nursed him when an infant; and I don't think she ever saw your brother until he was quite a lad; so you perceive Greyling has the prior claim."

"I have often wondered, when I could in no other way account for poor Hetty's variable humours, if she might not in early life have met with some serious disappointment," said Bertha, musingly.

"Yes; I fear our dear little friend carries a sad and heavy heart beneath that gay exterior. She has had her trials, the greater, that her young affections were bestowed upon an object, by whom



they were not only unreturned, but unknown, and unsuspected. Poor Hetty!"

"Dear Mrs. Morton, do not think me curious or inquisitive, but I should like to hear something more connected with the history of Hetty's early days, I must own."

"Of Miss Bridgenorth herself, I have little to tell; for, in truth, it is rather surmise than actual knowledge, that leads me to judge and speak as I have just done, though there are times when I feel convinced my suspicions are not altogether groundless. Few beyond myself are aware, or even guess, how deeply she was interested in that fearful and deep tragedy, that deprived the gay world of two of its brightest ornaments, and caused so great a sensation at the time. 'Tis a sad story, dear, and really I was so young when the event took place, that I have but an imperfect recollection of all the facts related with it. One thing I do remember, and remember too well ever to forget. Strange, how lasting are early impressions, and how indelibly they fix themselves on the mind. I allude to the singular effect produced upon my young imagination by the surpassing beauty of one of the actors in that dismal scene. His features are so completely engraven upon my memory, that, were I a painter, I am certain I could portray them accurately, though it is five-and-twenty years since I saw him, and I was then a mere child."

"What became of him?"

"None ever knew. There were rumours of some unfair transactions at the gaming table; a duel was fought—his adversary fell, and he disappeared; but whether he is living or dead, no one knows. The affair made a great ferment in the fashionable circles at the time, but, like all such things, the

excitement lasted a very short while. With the absence of the actors the interest died away, and I doubt much if even the names of the parties would be remembered at this moment."

"How forcibly those expressions you made use of, in reference to that man's countenance, remind me of what I have so often thought about Mr. Darcey; for though I never saw him until he married my mother—and he certainly was then what is called past the prime of life—yet at times, despite that woe-worn and painfully sad look, which scarcely ever leaves his features, there is a sort of command in the very turn of his magnificent eye—a loftiness of manner and a degree of dignity, both in face and person, that must be seen to be understood. He certainly *has* been very, *very* handsome."

"How extraordinary it is, that by no chance whatever should I have met Mr. Darcey."

"Not at all extraordinary, my dear Mrs. Moron; he rarely leaves our own grounds, and excepting a few formal visits from the surrounding country gentry, we mix in no society whatever; indeed, so exceedingly painful and annoying does the mention of his early friends appear to be, that my mother never refers to past times; and excepting when he went to Germany about four years ago, none, either of Mr. Darcey's or her own, have ever visited us. Then, indeed, dear Hetty insisted upon coming; and my mother—fearing lest she should put her often repeated threat of paying her old school-fellow a visit, into execution at some less desirable time—consented to receive her, making her promise to leave the hall before his return, which she did the moment we got a letter, saying we might expect him home."

"It must be a great trial to your poor mother the continued state of gloom and low spirits which you describe Mr. Darcey to be."

"I assure you it is, Mrs. Morton; and she will not be able to bear up against it longer. I grieve to say her health is daily declining and though she never complains, one may see she suffers greatly."

"Let us hope the change will be of service to them both."

"I sincerely trust it may, though I doubt much if change, or anything else, can make the slightest alteration in Mr. Darcey; he has indulged those melancholy feelings so long, that I fear there is little chance of his ever being able to shake them off. He is much to be pitied."

"Will their stay be for long?"

"That entirely depends upon circumstances. My mother said, should she perceive the slightest improvement in his spirits, she would permit him to remain until the beginning of summer; if not, they will return in March."

"Well, love, I sincerely hope, for all your sufferings, things may amend; it must be very distressing to live with, and hourly witness, such suffering; one must necessarily be endured by a person in responding a state as Mr. Darcey; I know of no trials greater."

"You are perfectly right, dear Mrs. Morton, and could you but be aware of half my poor mother has to put up with, you would feel for her indeed."

"I am certain of it, love; but let us hope—God does much, and a change may yet take place and not despair."

"We have hoped so long, and so long been disappointed," replied Bertha, sadly, "that I beg

give up all thoughts of ever seeing him other than he is."

" 'Tis most melancholy," said Mrs. Morton, thoughtfully; "did you not say Mr. Darcey is very handsome?"

"No, I did not say he *is*, though I am sure he *must* have been, but you shall judge for yourself; I have his miniature in my dressing-case. He gave it me many years ago, and told me with a ghastly smile—oh, how well do I remember that smile!—to take 'the thing,' as my mother would not have it, and he had no wish to recal what he once was. 'The glass gives me no such recollection,' continued he, with a wildness of manner quite frightful to behold, 'and grateful I am it is so. How few would know this haggard visage for the once gay features of Henry——.' The rest of his words I could not catch, as he muttered rather than spoke them; but some terrible thoughts must have been passing within, for he became almost convulsed by the violence of his feelings; and suddenly darting a wild glance at me, sternly bade me leave the room; I complied of course, and since that day I have kept the miniature, but never mentioned, even to my mother, he had given it me."

"Some strange mystery must be there, Bertha, I greatly fear," said Mrs. Morton. "Is he often attacked by those violent fits of emotion?"

"Often—very often."

"And he always desires to be left alone?"

"Yes; he will not even allow my mother to remain in the room; he is always better when Augustus is at home, and that is one great reason why I so dislike his leaving us. It has frequently struck me, that while my brother remains near him,

his manner displays less of apprehension and than at other times. I cannot well describe that sort of ceaseless, restless, *watching* way—may so call it—he has. It appears to me as though he lived in constant fear of some terrible disclosure being made, that would lead to fearful consequences. It is a great relief both to mamma and myself, knowing how very little of all this Augustus sees; indeed, when they are together, except that fixed gloom of manner which never leaves him, Mr. Darcey is not only conversable, but companionable.

“I am sure, had Augustus been his *own* son, he could not love him better than he does; and his brother, on his part, entertains the greatest regard and affection for him. Augustus often says he never met with a man upon whose judgment and sound sense he so perfectly relies, as his father; the name by which he frequently addresses Mr. Darcey.

“I verily believe, were any one to utter a disrespectful word of him, in Augustus’ hearing, he would call the offender out, so great is the esteem and respect he has for his mother’s husband.”

“Do you think he ever mentions anything of his by-gone days to your brother?”

“Oh, never, never; he seems far more anxious to avoid should the slightest remark be made about his former acquaintances, while Augustus is present than he does when we are alone.”

“I can scarcely understand that.”

“Nor I either; loving Augustus as he does, he might imagine it would be some relief to his feelings, were his griefs imparted to one who would fully enter into, and sympathize with his sufferings.”

"And your brother never attempts to lead Mr. Darcey on—never tries to draw anything from him."

"Oh, no; mamma has strictly enforced it upon us both, never to ask him any questions, nor inquire about his relations, friends, or the least thing that may recal other times."

"Humph! singular, most singular," mused Mrs. Morton. "At what age should you imagine the miniature was taken?"

"Five-and-twenty, he told me."

"Five-and-twenty! What age should you suppose Mr. Darcey to be now?"

"I am not ready at guessing ages, but I certainly think he must be fifty."

"How long has he been married to your mother?"

"About fifteen years."

"You have no objection to my seeing the miniature of which you speak?"

"None in the least. I have never shewn it to any one, because I have always had a vague feeling—and I can scarcely tell why—that there were some unpleasant circumstances attached to it I had better remain in ignorance of. Doubtless such fancies are foolish, and I am wrong in suffering them to weigh against my better judgment; but I cannot help it, they will obtrude, despite myself."

"Will you fetch it, Bertha?"

"Certainly."

So saying, she quitted the room, and quickly returned with the open miniature in her hand.

"Merciful powers!" ejaculated Mrs. Morton, as her eye fell upon those well remembered features—  
"do you tell me this, *this* is the likeness of Mr.

Darcey, your mother's husband?—Speak, Bertha tell me there is no mistake."

"None, none whatever, dear Mrs. Morton; the miniature is intended for Mr. Darcey; but what makes you so strangely agitated?"

"Nothing, nothing—take it away; and as you value the peace of all belonging to you—do not, charge you, let Miss Bridgenorth see it."

"Certainly, I will comply with your request but surely you cannot refuse to tell me what it so powerfully affects you."

"I cannot, Bertha, believe me—I dare not for your own sake. All I can tell you is, so fearful a mystery surrounds Mr. Darcey, that I would not for worlds you should know the depths of it—least, not from *my* lips; the day may—nay, I fear *must* come, when you will know all. Take away the miniature, dear, and let us drop the subject—I am wholly unable to pursue it further now—and earnestly beseech you, Bertha, never to revert to it again. It is painful, most painful, those thoughts the sight of that miniature has recalled; scenes brought back as forcibly to my memory as if they had but happened yesterday. Promise me you will never shew that miniature to a living soul;—promise me, child—I insist upon it."

"Dear Mrs. Morton, believe me your wish is sufficient. I pray you be calm—would to Heaven I had never mentioned it!"

"Forgive me this violence, dear Bertha; but my feelings were too strongly excited at the moment to be under my own control. It is entirely in consideration of others, that I dread any other eye but mine seeing that face—least of all, Hetty Bridgenorth!"

"Believe me, dear Mrs. Morton, no person in existence shall ever behold it again."

"Nay, my love, do not destroy it—pray do not ; all I ask of you is, to keep it securely locked up, and never to produce it until compelled by circumstances."

"Do not fear me, it shall never see light again if I can avoid it."

"Did you ever shew the miniature to your brother?"

"No, never."

"Has Mrs. Darcey ever mentioned its existence?"

"No."

"Does Mr. Darcey still bear any *very* remarkable resemblance to it?"

"None ; indeed, at this moment, were it not for the eyes, one might doubt if it was ever intended for him."

"So changed !—what will not time and sorrow do ?"

"Indeed you may truly say that ; for within my recollection, he is so much altered I should hardly believe him to be the same man."

"And had you seen him as I saw him last, in all the magnificence of his splendid beauty, compared with the wreck you now describe him—truly, the change must be terrible."

"It is not so much the look of age one traces, as that settled melancholy, woe-worn, almost heart-broken expression, his features always wear."

"Heart-broken, indeed !—what else can he be ?"

"Do you suspect——"

"Ask me no questions, love ; the less you know about that sad tale the better. But, come, we are pursuing this distressing subject further than is



either wise or well. Go, dear Bertha, and prepare yourself for a ride; the fresh air will do us both good."

So saying, she affectionately kissed the fair brow of her lovely friend, and they separated to prepare for their morning's drive.

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## CHAPTER XV.

"SURRENDERED at discretion, taken without a shot being fired, and no terms insisted on!—it is indeed one of the finest victories on record; achieved by a conqueror whose fame has set all men on the *qui vive* to catch but a glimpse of one who could perform so much in such an inconceivably short space of time. The thing is truly wonderful!" exclaimed Colonel Arburthnott, seating himself at one of the tables in the United Service club-room, and taking up a newspaper as if in the act of searching for further intelligence—"truly wonderful!"

"News from India, did you say, Arburthnott," drawled young Follett; "I have looked over the papers and saw nothing of the sort,—where did you hear it? What fort is taken? and who was the general in command?"

"Now, out upon thee for an Ostrogoth, Harry Follett; dost think I trouble my sublime head about such musty stuff as Indian warfare?—what care I how many tawny skins there may be more or less at every month's end—who has given the most blows or received the worst wounds!—Not I; I've

had my share of all that sort of thing for these next five years at least, and——”

“ Well, then, what *are* you talking about?—do try and make yourself understood, if it be within the power of possibility. What’s the use of rousing a fellow out of his pleasant doze to listen to stuff that has neither truth nor reason in it? I bet a wager ’tis some rigmarole got up by yourself to excite curiosity, that you may have the supreme pleasure of laughing at those who are fools enough to seem interested about what never took place.”

“ Certes, Sir Henry Follett, one would scarcely imagine you had been roused out of a *pleasant doze* ; but come, my head is too full of pleasing fancies to admit aught like long abiding wrath ; though your speech is not over civil,” laughed the good-natured colonel.

“ Well, well, Arburthnott, I beg your pardon ;—I really had no intention of offending you ; but you are so deucedly provoking when once you get into that bantering strain, that one hardly knows whether one’s being laughed at or not.”

“ Never more in earnest in my life, I assure you, upon the word of an honest man.”

“ Then *what* is it you allude to ?”

“ Why, the capture of that most impregnable citadel, that has been so often besieged, and as often gallantly withstood all the united efforts of the armed hosts in array against it,—the hitherto unconquerable heart of Sir Felix Greyling is subjugated, never to become free again.”

“ Pooh ! is that all ?” growled Sir Henry Follett, composing himself again for a nap—“ I guessed it was some such rubbish. You’re enough to provoke a saint, Arburthnott—that you are.”

“ Oh, oh ! what’s the matter ?” cried the hand-

some Horatio Dashington; "if Follett's v there's something vastly good in the wind, I sworn,—what is it, Arburthnott?"

"Neither more nor less than that Sir Felix ling has fallen over head and ears in love s sight."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Dashington, "that's too to be true, I fear! What's your authority?"

"My own eyes."

"But may they not have deceived you?"

"No, no,—'tis as I tell you, by Jove! Dashington, had you but seen what an owl ling made of himself, you'd never have for it."

"Would I could rhyme rhymes, I'd pen a gratulatory ode upon the occasion."

"Take care what you're about, Dashington! Greyling's not one to be laughed at or rid with impunity, I can tell you."

"Never fear me, my dear fellow, I've too respect and esteem for Sir Felix Greyling the risk of offending him, believe me; but the fair *she* that has done all this mischief?"

"That's more than I can tell you, as far name is concerned, for I did not even hear it tioned; but, upon my soul, Dashington, setti joking aside, she is one of the most lovely v I ever beheld. Why, I protest, if there I d stand a full hour, winking and blinking li

and while I watched her fitting through the mazes of the dance, her tiny waist encircled by the thick arm of that fat porpoise, Lord Frampton, I felt convinced how perfectly correct the elderlies are, when they assert the impropriety of waltzing; indeed, such has been my ideas respecting that very elegant amusement ever since I was thrown from my own coach-box, and dislocated my ankle, and it is as much as ever I can do to stand patiently by and see the most beautiful women in the room whisked and whirled about by a parcel of stupid, dull donkeys, who have neither good sense nor good looks to recommend them. I felt monstrously inclined to trip up the heels of that overgrown numskull, or bribe the footman to do it for me."

"Out of sheer spite and jealousy."

"Don't you talk too largely, my fine fellow;—wait till you have seen this divinity, and then, if you escape heart-whole, I'll look upon you as some wonderful phenomenon, and respect you accordingly. I can't get that voice and face out of my head, sleeping or waking,—she positively haunts me."

"What is she like?"

"Like nothing you ever saw, dreamed, or thought of!"

"Do you think she would make a good rival to Lady Margaret Snowden?" lisped out the tall, thin, pale, blue-eyed, yellow-locked Frederic Lankford.

"Name them not in the same breath, I charge you. What! compare the plump, hawk-eyed, red-skinned, vain, coquetting, empty-headed Lady Margaret Snowden with this new found gem, this graceful swan, this nymph of beauty, this bewitching syren, this bright queen of hearts!—'tis well thou

just not seen her, for that and that only, set  
 that from my justly excited indignation."

"Well, I am rather glad she has shewn it  
 wherever she may be. I have long wished  
 some acknowledged beauty to enlighten the her-  
 sere of fashion, and contend the palm of sup-  
 eriority so long swayed by that scornful dame."

"Alas, poor Lankford!" laughed Dashington. "he has never either forgiven or forgott  
 the disdainful way in which she refused his pro-  
 posed arm at Lord Abigail's. Ha, ha! thou 'sh  
 bear no malice nor hatred in thy heart;—remem-  
 ber that Frederic Lankford.—remember that!"

"Ah! well, you may laugh if you like, Dashin-  
 ton; but I can tell you it will be a rich treat to see  
 her obliged to strike her colours, and leave the field  
 to her conqueror—a rich treat," said the spiteful  
 youth, rubbing his hands with pure delight at the  
 bare thought.

"Why, Heaven help your vanity, Lankford! I  
 imagine a woman that half the men in London have  
 been running after and worshipping, either for her  
 self or her purse, these last three years, would take  
 the trouble to look at such a penniless boy as *you*  
 is rather too much of a good thing."

"Permit me to observe, Horatio Dashington  
 began the wrathful Lankford.

"Bless us, my dear fellow, don't take the trouble  
 to be angry with *me*—I would not offend you for  
 all the world, and if I've said anything you don't  
 like, I can but own that I'm sorry. Come, shake  
 hands. Don't be wroth about such a silly matter."

"Humph!" muttered the irate youth, as, thrusting  
 his hands into his pockets, and turning short  
 round upon his heel, he walked to the other end of  
 the room, and gazed with a dogged, sullen expres-  
 sion out of the window.

"Let Lady Margaret alone, and turn your attention in the right quarter," laughed Colonel Arburthnott.

"Well, but you know we have not all had your luck, Arburthnott, and it is a moral impossibility to praise and admire what one has never seen,—surely you don't suppose any man in his senses would take your ravings for a portrait? Tell us, in sober reason, what this admired of all beholders is truly, *really* like, and then we may form some idea as to how much of worship your idol is entitled to."

"Like! why, as I said before, she is like nothing ever seen upon earth since its creation. She is perfection, absolute perfection, from the crown of her beautiful head to the sole of her pretty foot."

"Pooh, nonsense!—that's no description at all; besides, what you may think beautiful might strike me as quite the reverse. I must have an account—honestly and faithfully given—of each feature, look, and tone, before I am trepanned into a surrender of my heart by the laudatory notes of another. What colour are her eyes?"

"Deep, rich, melting, moving, speaking, sparkling orbs, of that most lovely and soul-captivating hue, the darkest of all dark violet, with enormous pupils and lashes, that more than rest upon the cheek. I do verily believe, were she to draw the chiselled corners of that sweet rose-bud of a mouth a little out beyond its lovely proportions, she could touch the ends with her ruby lips."

"So much for mouth and eyes,—allowing at least one hundred per cent. for exaggeration, there's enough left for good looks at all events. Now, then, the teeth and hair?"

"The teeth!—why, so dazzlingly white they

might guide an army across a common in a *dark* night, were the owner's mouth large enough to admit of their all being seen. Talk of ivory!—black compared!"

"Ha, ha, capital!—well, the hair?"

"We have all *heard* of *auburn* ringlets, though few are so blest as to have *really* seen them. I never beheld the *true* auburn tint but once before, and that was on the head of a French girl. I remember falling more than half in love with the damsel, although decidedly *ugly*, being bewitched by the singular beauty of her tresses. Little did I then think I should ever again be gladdened by the sight of such silken clusters,—far, far less dream of meeting them in company with all that is most perfect in woman's form."

"Is she tall or short?"

"Rather tall than otherwise, with the most majestic carriage you can possibly imagine; she slight, but so beautifully rounded that were a horse befitting the size of each modelled limb passed over it, I swear there's not a portion of the delicate flesh but it would touch, and none upon which would press. The finished roundness of her waist and arms must be seen to be believed. No sculptor ever formed anything one-thousandth part so perfect."

"The foot and hand?"

"The hand *most* beautiful—formed in Nature's fairest mould; but if there is a fault—one thing that can raise a doubt of finished, absolute beauty—'tis her foot."

"Her foot!—nay, that's a fault, *indeed*. But where's the blemish?"

"'Tis *too small*,—too fairy like—you seem to feel, while looking at her, that, sylph as she is

they are hardly large enough to support her weight."

"Oh! that is a defect I can most readily reconcile,—had they been what I began to fear you were about to say, *too large*, 't would have thrown all her other beauties in the shade. A lovely woman, with a large, thick foot is terrible indeed."

"Why, certainly, the *want* of size is a fault on the right side; but were she as ugly as the fabled Gorgons, with a foot like Satanus, one would be likely to forget all while listening to that seraph voice. Ye gods! how can mortal speech convey a notion of its power! But to have beheld that imperturbable being—that man with the adamant heart (as my pretty cousin calls him) entranced, enthralled, enraptured, bewildered by those silvery tones! Ah, there spoke its praise! But here he comes, you shall hear what he has to say."

"I doubt if he'll say anything at all about the matter, should he be as much captivated as you describe. You know, love is ever silent. He will be a formidable rival among the host of suitors. I would not choose to enter the lists with *him*," said Frank Blondell, a good-natured, indolent young man, who passed his time pretty equally divided between the opera house and his club, and who rarely took the trouble to give an opinion upon any subject, but when he did speak it was always in short sentences, upon which account he was known among his acquaintances by the nickname of "Ossian."

"Well said, friend Frank,—and I would not advise *you* to try, believe me; it may chance to prove a much more difficult task than might exactly suit your quiet temperament, so take my advice, and don't enter into a warfare that can end



but in defeat, to say nothing of sufferings proceeding from wounds inflicted by those dangerous weapons, the bright eyes of this lady fair."

"Have no fears from me, Dashington; the sight of beauty never troubled me, and I trust never will."

"That's because you have never seen it. Wait till you do, and then I give you leave to boast."

"Perhaps so—may be—don't know," and Ossie again fell to smoking his cigar in tranquil ease nor uttered another syllable until the word "opera" informed his mother's coachman where he wished his lethargic person to be deposited, about ten o'clock that same evening.

"Dead for a ducat,—slaughtered outright!—ah Greyling!" laughed Colonel Arburthnott, as Sir Felix appeared in the door-way of their club-room.

"Whose death are you speaking about, Arburthnott? who has been slaughtered?" inquired Sir Felix Greyling, carelessly turning over the papers and looking very much as if his thoughts were on other matters bent. "Any one I know?"

"Now don't try to appear ignorant. What were all eyes and ears employed about at Lady Malcolm's last night, but gazing at and listening to the most——"

"Pray, speak like a reasonable being Arburthnott, or let me do it for you," said Horatio Dashington. "Have the goodness to inform us, Greyling, who this beautiful syren is, whose description alone is setting all our fellows together by the ears, not to mention the reckoning of some half-score (Arburthnott and myself included) who are well nigh distraught,—and all for love?"

"I do not know exactly to what lady you are alluding, unless you mean a Miss Murray."

"A Miss Murray! talk of a king or a queen, a sun, or a moon, for there may be others; but if you would not make me your mortal foe through life, never, I command you, talk of a Miss Murray again in my presence. Call her *the* Murray, (if that is her name,) the unrivalled, the star of beauty, and the queen of love."

"Truly, Arburthnott, you have mounted your highest stilts this morning. I am willing to admit Miss Murray is beautiful—most beautiful—and as charming in manners as lovely in person; but——"

"But! but me no buts, 'tis useless—worse than useless—to attempt hoodwinking me in that way. No, no,—I understand the true state of the case, so I give you fair warning that I intend entering the field, lance in hand, to tilt with all comers. I shall find a formidable rival in Sir Felix Greyling, but courage, say I,—faint heart never won fair lady, and the greater the difficulty, more glorious the victory."

"Really, Arburthnott, I must say you are taking great liberties with Miss Murray's name. She is not a fit subject for the coarse jokes and ribald mirth of all the idle young men who may choose to pass judgment upon her."

"Gently—gently, Greyling, don't work yourself into a passion. I have taken *no* liberties with Miss Murray's name, nor uttered one disrespectful word regarding her,—Heaven forbid. May my tongue blister and forget its office when I am guilty of so heinous a sin!—but that she has made as deep an impression upon my heart as it is useless denying she has done upon yours, I glory to acknowledge. I would not be that insensible monster who could look unmoved upon so fair a creature,—no, not for worlds."

"Well, Arburthnott, I have no wish to quarrel with you, nor make Miss Murray a theme of dispute; I shall not interfere with your endeavours to gain her good opinion; all I ask is, not to make her beauty and accomplishments matter for club-house discussion;—and now I must wish you good-morning, as I have an appointment in the city, at three o'clock." So saying, he extended his hand, somewhat reluctantly, to Arburthnott, and walked haughtily from the house.

"There! who shall doubt my judgment, or love at first sight, from this time forth for evermore," laughed Arburthnott. "Poor Greyling!—no, I won't say *poor*, for I will lay aside all pretensions to penetration in such matters until the end of my natural life, if he is looked coldly on—a thousand may woo her, but he will *win* her. Now, mark me, I'll lay a cool five hundred, that before this day six months the world shall hear of Sir Felix Greyling as the successful suitor for the hand of the *belle* Murray."

"Keep your money to yourself, Colonel Arburthnott—you have roused my curiosity, and hang round me if I don't try my chance. I can't see why I should not make the attempt as well as Greyling, or why I mayn't succeed, supposing I choose to take the trouble, which I most assuredly intend doing."

"Do you? Then, trust me, Stapleton, it will be labour in vain."

"That is more than you, with all your sagacity can answer for. I have as good a face," continued the coxcomb, conceitedly arranging his fair curl at the chimney glass, "and a far longer purse with a manner, I flatter myself, somewhat better fitted for love-making than that frozen stock-fish Felix Greyling. No, no,—Arthur Stapleton is no

one to be said nay to, even by such a divinity as your *belle Murray*."

"You certainly have as good a right to try your luck as another, but I would not have you too sanguine, for it strikes me you are not the man of all others this gentle damsel would delight to honour."

"That is my concern, not yours; and, let me tell you, Arburthnott, I think you must have a devilish deal of vanity to imagine you can so easily cut me out."

"I fancy no such thing, trust me, Stapleton! My firm conviction is, we have none of us the most remote chance in that quarter. The prize is already won, and he who would carry off the fair Murray must first dispose of Sir Felix Greyling."

"Well, we shall see—we shall see. I know naught concerning the lady beyond those rhapsodies I have been quietly listening to, this last hour, and care not two straws who woos or who wins her; of one thing I am certain, I shall never enter the lists of her worshippers, having no particular wish to become a slave; and as Arburthnott appears to think it absolutely impossible even to behold her, and remain free, I choose the safer course, and intend keeping out of harm's way."

"Wisely resolved, Lumley; it *is*, as you sagely observe, better to keep out of harm's way; for, of a certainty, you are a doomed man, should you be bold enough to venture within the magic circle of this all-powerful enchantress. Alas, for me, I cast myself into bondage ere I was aware of the shackles I had so irretrievably bound around me! Take your warning, Lumley, by my hapless fate, nor risk advance where retreat is vain. To behold her is to love, and to love is but despair!"

"You have my full permission to love, and de-

sPAIR afterwards," said the cautious Lumley, laughing; "I shall neither do one nor the other, trust *me*; so, good morning Arburthnott, and I wish you joy of your present state of delightful uncertainty. I never was in love, and never mean to be. Good morning, gentlemen."

"You'll be caught some of these odd days, my fine fellow," laughed Colonel Arburthnott, preparing to depart; "you'll be caught, and I shall live to see it."

"What an egregious ass Arburthnott makes of himself!" mouthed out Frederic Lankford, as he saw from his post of observation the good-natured colonel shaking hands with a friend, opposite the window. "I declare 'tis enough to provoke a Job, hearing him go on in that ridiculous manner about a red-faced country girl that nobody seems to know anything of. I haven't common patience with such absurd nonsense. I dare say she is no great thing *gs* after all!"

"Now I differ from you most completely, Lankford," said Horatio Dashington; "in the first place, I'll bet you twenty guineas she's not *red* faced; *no* woman, however regular her features, or however perfect her form, could lay claim to the title of *beautiful* if she carried a *red skin* about with her; *and* the next, depend upon it, she isn't somebody *that* nobody knows, if she was taken by Mrs. Cleveland Morton to Lady Malcolm's party, and there made a decided conquest of Sir Felix Greyling. No, no; the Belle Murray, as Arburthnott calls this new star, is sent, like the last comet will be, to set us all in a blaze, depend upon it."

"I shall first go and try to discover the extent of danger, and then commence an inspection of all the water pipes."

"Pish!" grunted the sulky Lankford; "Dash—

ington, you are a greater owl than Arburthnott himself!"

"Many thanks for your good opinion of me, Frederic Lankford," laughed Horatio, taking up a newspaper, and comfortably settling himself in his accustomed quiet corner—"many thanks for your good opinion of me, with sincere wishes for my own speedy improvement."

"Humph! plenty of room for it!" muttered the yellow-haired youth, in his surliest tone. "Well, *I do* hope she is handsome enough to dispute the palm with Lady Margaret Snowden,—I shall be delighted to see her pride humbled. One would have thought I had been the son of a coalheaver instead of a peer! The haughty jade!"

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## CHAPTER XVI.

"WHY, I declare my porter has more work in opening the door, to give admittance to all the *billet doux* and nosegays, sent by your thousand and one adorers, than his pay is worth; I shall positively have to increase his wages, if things are to go on in this way much longer," said Mrs. Morton, laughing. "See here," continued she, laying down a splendid *bouquet*, of the choicest and rarest exotics; "see, here is an offering on a new year's morn!"

"Well, to be sure, they are lovely!" cried little Miss Bridgenorth; "do look, Bertha; was ever anything half so beautiful seen in this world before?"

"They appear very fresh," said Bertha, slowly raising her head, and looking up from the piece of

embroidery upon which she was employed—"very fresh and very pretty."

"How *can* you be so provokingly indifferent Bertha? Why, I declare there is not a duchess in London but would be proud to carry such darlings as these."

"Then it is a great pity, dear Hetty, they were not sent where they would have been better appreciated; and, as far as I am concerned in the matter, Daly has full permission to refuse entrance to *billet-doux* and *bouquets* in future."

"Now, 'pon my word, that is too much, even my patience, to endure unmoved! Here have been, for this week, hugging up, fresh water-lilies, picking, and pruning, those shabby dead things that are an absolute disgrace to Mrs. Morton's table; there, I say, have you been cherishing, drawing from, and, for aught I know, weeping over, a shrunk camelia and shrivelled rose—yet, goodness guide me! you refuse even so much as to look at these delicious loves!"

"Never mind, dear Hetty; leave off scolding Bertha, and guess who sent them," laughed Mr. Morton.

"Colonel Arburthnott?"

"No."

"Sir Henry Follett?"

"Wrong again."

"Lord Delamere."

"No; try once more."

"Well, then, I'm sure I don't know, unless indeed, 'tis Greyling; and now I look again, I think it must be Felix who sent them; for, I am convinced, no gardener but his gardener, and no hot-house but his hot-house, could produce such flowers at this season of the year; but, dear me, I thought he was away in the country."

"So he *was*, but so he *is not*."

"Why, you don't say so? When did he return?"

"Last night, as he tells me in a short note sent with Bertha's posy, and will be here early this evening."

"Well, I'm so delighted; just fancy!"

"Fancy what?"

"Why, that we shall have our dear Sir Felix among us again; it has seemed like an age to me since he went away. I don't intend letting him off quite so easily another time, I promise you. I vow he sha'n't go out of town,—no, not even for a day, till the season is over. Just fancy how all the parties would have looked this winter without Bertha and Felix."

"Pretty much as they did last year, dear Hetty, I should imagine; and it strikes me, that in such crowded rooms, as it is the will and pleasure of Mrs. Morton and yourself to squeeze me, the presence or absence of an individual, more or less, can be of very trifling moment."

"*An* individual more or less, that is, the generality of individuals who are to be met with at evening parties, may answer to your polite remark tolerably well; but, surely you do not mean to call Sir Felix Greyling *an* individual; why I always reckon him as twenty at the very least. Is he not a perfect host in himself?"

"I really don't know; I am but an indifferent calculator, and of necessity an imperfect judge of the merits of the case; but I should think half-a-dozen men in a small room reckoning as twenty each, that is to say, six gentlemen performing the onerous party duties with ease and propriety, which said duties, when equally divided, would take



up the time and engross the attention of one hundred and twenty lords of the creation, *must*, as you justly observe, be a *host* in themselves."

"You are inclined to be both witty and meretricious this morning, Miss Murray; but be pleased to remember I said nothing about *six* such men as Sir Felix Greyling being met with, ever having been met with, or ever to be met with; and I fancy, hear you as often heard the question, when a party is on the *tapis*, of 'I wonder, mamma, if Sir Felix Greyling will be there?' and the as often answer, 'I don't know, my dear; I hope he will; be sure you take care to look your best; he is one of the finest matches in England,'—I say had you heard these sort of things as frequently as I have, you would just speak and think about him as *I do*."

"Dear Hetty, when will you learn to leave off talking nonsense?" said Bertha, laughing.

"Nonsense! I'm not talking nonsense. What are you doing with those flowers? I thought they weren't worth a look ten minutes ago, and now you appear as though you wanted to kill them with kindness, or eat them up, or some such piece of absurdity.

"Give them to me; they will be far safer in my keeping than in yours. Come, come, let me have them."

"No, indeed, Hetty, I shall do no such a thing. I cannot spare them, they are so very beautiful."

"Well now, just fancy! was ever anything so preposterously ridiculous? What has come to the girl? She is as changeable as a weathercock, and don't know her own mind two minutes together. I declare I feel quite provoked, that I do."

"Never grieve about a woman's variableness, Hetty, for methinks if you once begin that, you will

be a sorrowing being to the end of your days ; besides, why should you be wroth with Miss Murray, merely because she has sufficient good taste and discernment to admire what two such sensible bodies as you and I have already pronounced unrivalled ?”

“Wroth ! I’m not wroth,” exclaimed the kind-hearted little soul, gaily ; “no, no ; my head is too full of the pleasing anticipations of again beholding my pet, to care about being angry with man, woman, or child. She may kill, and bury them into the bargain, if she feels disposed, without provoking my ire ; but, good bye ; I’m off to Madame Dormer’s, to see after a new cap ; I’ve not one to wear, for I declare ever since Greyling told me my crimson velvet turban, with the gold flowers, was far too gay to be becoming, I have never once put it on my head. Just fancy, how it could be possible I should ever be able to endure the odious fright again. No ; I protest I have not seen it since ! Who would think of wearing a thing that Sir Felix Greyling called unbecoming ? Not I, I promise you ; he has decidedly the best taste of any man in England ; so I told my maid, as she valued her place, to keep it out of my way, or I would burn it, though it cost me no end of money. Well, well, never mind ; good-bye, good-bye. I ought to have been in Waterloo Place two hours ago, but when once I set my foot in here, there’s no getting away. Farewell till evening ; good bye.”

“Stop, stop, Hetty ; do not run off in such a hurry ; promise me, should you meet Mrs. Hunter at Madame Dormer’s, (for I know she goes there almost every morning,) you will say nothing about Sir Felix Greyling.”

“Now is that very likely ?” exclaimed the little woman, popping her head, with half the diminutive

body attached to it, into the open doorway again *is* that very likely? Why, what do you take me for? Mrs. Morton, a downright, finished, accomplished thorough, out-and-out simpleton? I sometime talk to the woman, because she will manage to get up a conversation whenever she can catch hold of me, whether I like it or no; but I have neither love nor respect for her, I can tell you; and to imagine I should be such an owl as to bring the wearisome woman here, is rather too much of good joke. Why, bless me! it is her, and some half score like her, who have already nearly tormented the poor man to death. I do verily believe it is the incessant love-making of those vexatious creatures that has worried all the colour out of his cheeks; not that I should like him a bit the better for being red, instead of white; no, indeed; but it is so provoking to behold an honest, unoffending creature, like our dear Felix, harassed about by a parcel of heartless feminines, in the way he is and the silly host of them, one and all, think, because, forsooth, he is pale, and interesting-looking, he must be in love, and nothing will suit or satisfy their egregious vanity, but to set his melancholy eyes and grave manner down to her own particular score. What stuff it is!

"Well, then, as I was going to say, is it at all likely I should purposely place one of his most unrelenting persecutors at his side, (for when he present she will take no other position; try as you will, there is no getting her to move a jot,) where I want him all to myself. No, no; I'm rather wiser than that amounts to, trust me."

"I must say, I think you are somewhat severe upon poor Mrs. Hunter this morning, Miss Bridgforth," said Bertha, laughing.

"Oh, fiddledumdee! I go sometimes to see her, because, for a very good reason, I can't help it. She literally drags me in, without saying, 'with your leave,' or 'by your leave;' it is not '*do* come,' but '*you shall* come.' She flatters herself I don't see through her manœuvres, though there she is mistaken.

"No, no, Mrs. Hunter, you would not take such a monstrous deal of pains to cultivate the society of a little old woman like Hetty Bridgenorth, unless you fancied there was something to be gained by such an immense outlay of red-hot affection. I'll tell you," continued she, advancing quite into the middle of the room—(she had been standing mid-doorway for the last quarter of an hour)—"I'll tell you how it is with Mrs. Hunter. She is aware Greyling and I are sworn allies, and she thinks by coaxing and wheedling she can get me to speak a good word for her; but there she is vastly mistaken. I never could be friendly with a notorious whackerteller, and she is one of the biggest extant."

"A *what*, dear Hetty?" exclaimed Bertha, in the utmost surprise—"a *what*? I protest I never heard such a droll expression before."

"Ah! there you shew your ignorance, Miss! Whackerteller is one of the commonest words in use."

"With *you*, Hetty, it possibly may be; but as to *general* use I have my doubts! At all events, I own my ignorance; for not only did I never hear it before, but I candidly confess I have not the most remote notion of what it means."

"Why, then, simply this:—Whackertellers are persons who cannot, even by chance or otherwise, bring themselves to relate a circumstance as they

know it actually happened, and get so eternally into the habit of telling white lies—for ever confounding truth with falsehood—that at length they cannot distinguish fact from fiction, sense from sound. If, for instance, a whackerteller chance to hear a relation of your own was about to be married, ten to one but they would come and tell you the individual in question died last week, and was to be interred next day, and, should you attempt setting the matter right, would exclaim—‘Lord, what does it signify! How rudely you always contradict people.’”

“So that is the word defined, and Mrs. Hunter is the word personified?”

“Exactly; just so.”

“Dear Hetty, you are so droll!”

“Droll! I see nothing droll about the matter, and I can tell you, if you knew but half the mischief done by people who indulge in that hateful and most wicked habit of exaggerating, just to make up a fine story, about things concerning which they know no more than the man in the moon; or rather, I should say, if you had suffered from the evil practice as I have done, you would hate the whole race of whackertellers, white liars, and exaggerators, as heartily as I do.”

“Well, I will try and do my best towards hating them, if you particularly wish it; but remember we are commanded to hate nothing, more especially our fellow-creatures.”

“Oh! I don’t call a person who works mischief for the sake of mischief a fellow-creature! I’ve no fellowship with liars. I never had, and trust I never shall have.”

“I quite agree with you, Hetty, in thinking that those who indulge in a system of falsehood, are

dangerous, bad people; but still I must side with Bertha in deeming it wrong to *hate* even them, and I doubt very much if you do so in your heart."

"I'm not at confession, so I don't consider it perfectly requisite to lay bare the bosom's secrets; but this I say, and say it boldly too—ay, without the slightest bit of mental reservation—that were I compelled, at the peril of life, to commit a sin, I would choose any atrocity rather than that of lying, because in the perpetration of other crimes, the end is seen in the act, but a falsehood is only the beginning of the wickedness, and who shall tell where it may stop?"

"Well argued, dear Hetty, 'tis pity some of those evil tongues you speak about were not within hearing, to benefit by your lecture."

"Heaven forbid! they are much better in the distance! Dear me, how time flies! and here I stand, chatter, chatter! By the way, I got a note from Mrs. Dugdale this morning, inviting me to one of her tea-drinkings to-night. I did not intend going, even before I came here, and now, I'm sure I sha'n't—only I forgot all about it till this moment, so you see I have not sent her an answer, and if she don't commence her brewing until she sees me, why, 'by my faith she'll wait a wee.' Just fancy! as if I should waste three or four good hours listening to old maids' scandal; for, though I'm one of the sisterhood, I've no very overwhelming love for the race, they are generally so spiteful." This was said by way of parenthesis, and, to make it sound less offensive, even to her own ears, in a soft aside. "Not but that Mrs. Dugdale is as dear, kind, and amiable an old soul as ever breathed, and might be an immense favourite of mine, if she would not make her house so exceed-

ingly disagreeable by filling it, from morning till night, with such a set of outlandish frumps ! 'Pon my word, you never beheld so extraordinary a collection of curiosities, in the forms of men and women, as she manages to get together, nay, I do believe, if the world were searched, for the purpose of selecting all that is odd, ugly, and unamiable, her drawingroom might carry off the palm."

"You call her an *old* soul, why, did I not hear she was going to be married ?"

"And, pray, may I ask who told you so, Mrs. Morton ?"

"That I cannot positively say, because I do not recollect ; but I am certain I *did* hear it."

"Then I'll tell you to what source you owe your information—that eternal meddling Mrs. Hunter. It's all fudge. She might quite as well have reported that *I* was going to make a fool of myself—the idea ! Why *will* you put faith in her inventions ? I should just as much think of seating myself in the car of a balloon, and suppose it would carry me across the Atlantic, setting me down at a particular spot on a particular day, hour, and minute, because I ordered it so to do, as I should dream of believing, or relating for truth, one word that woman ever uttered."

"Well, I must say I should like to see this antipathy of yours, dear Hetty," said Bertha, highly amused at the state of wrathful excitement displayed by her little friend. "How old is she ? and what is she like ?"

"Oh, she's not *very* ill-looking, certainly. Some call her pretty, but that's entirely matter of opinion. I don't consider her so—rather the reverse. Her eyes are too fierce, and her cheeks too pink, to please *me* ; though, upon the whole, she is not *ugly*—no, no, not downright plain—that must be

Owned. Then, for her age, 'tis just exactly the most trying and disagreeable in the whole course of a woman's existence—too old to be young, and too young to be old; the ancients think them juvenile, and the youthful look up to them as elderlies. There is no period of life at which a woman (more especially if she be single) shews herself to greater disadvantage, than at the provoking midway stage of three-and-thirty. Before then, if a woman is only commonly good-looking, she may manage tolerably well; crow's feet and silver threads have not yet obtruded themselves very conspicuously; and, so long as they can be kept at bay, people don't take the trouble to inquire the date of her birth, christening, &c., &c.; but the moment that terrible barrier between youth and loveliness, wrinkles, and grey hairs, is past; then it is the sufferer feels the keen poignancy of those sharp darts of ridicule, aimed at her from all sides. Small boys with lisping voices, and incipient moustache, talk largely about the horrors of having to do the agreeable to Miss So-and-so, the scraggy old maid, and tell you as gravely as possible, how frequently they were compelled to swallow champagne, to enable them to keep up their spirits, while the dreadful creature was making such fierce love to them. Old men make a point of praising the beauties of youth, and declare there is no age like sweet eighteen, whenever they chance to be in company with one who must look back through a terrible long line of fifteen years, ere she can call to mind how *she* looked and felt at that most winning period. Oh, la! there's no end of the misery endured by single women at that unfortunate era of their sojourn in this land of trouble. Dear heart, to think with what gloom they look forward; with what



repinings they glance back ; how they deplore over the many good matches they so foolishly refused ; and how painfully they speculate upon the probability of another such being offered them. The constant vexations and annoyances showered upon them sours their tempers, and makes them peevish, jealous, and spiteful ; repeated slights and affronts cause a kind of small envy and hatred to take root in their hearts against the younger and fairer portion of the community, who appear in their eyes the detested cause of those slights and affronts. Oh ! 'tis a most miserable time for them. Now, when a woman comes to be forty, nay, even long before that, say six-and-thirty, if she be blessed with a very common share of sense, the case is widely different ; then, indeed, she sees the vast absurdity of trying to appear what she is *not*, and begins seriously setting about making her life happy, without reference to others. She wont, perhaps, refuse to nurse her sister's children, or make her brother's tea ; but beyond this, her thoughts and pastimes are pretty much centered in herself. She now looks back with wonder and shame at the last five years of her life ; grieving to remember how many good friends she has estranged by her unkind speeches ; how much injustice she has been guilty of."

" Really, Miss Bridgenorth," said Bertha, laughing, " I am exceedingly delighted to find there is something like hope in store for me. The first part of your picture was so dreadfully gloomy, that I began to feel anxiously doubtful, if there might not be a downright necessity of getting married, to avoid becoming one of those terrible blots in society, whose case you thus feelingly deplore ; but you have thrown so much to cheer in the latter

portion of your sketch, that I still adhere to my original intention of remaining a member of the sisterhood."

"Do you?"

"Most decidedly—more particularly since you have held out such pleasing prospects, and shewn me how happy I may be some twenty years hence."

"Miss Bertha Murray, have I not already told you, if there is one thing I dislike beyond another, it is a fibber?"

"Well—but, Hetty——"

"No well but at all; you will no more remain an old maid, than I shall get married."

"I think the one is just as likely as the other."

"You don't think any such a thing."

"Why, Hetty, Hetty, I am always having to call you to order; you seem determined to quarrel with Bertha this morning, let her say what she will."

"You are just as bad as she is, Mrs. Morton, and do all you can to make her provoke me," said the little woman, in mock displeasure. "I have no patience with either of you, that I have not. Now, I'll lay a wager, because I want her to look her best, and smile her sweetest to-night, she'll be as prim, starch, and precise, as Miss Frumpton, when she's on her behaviour."

"But why should I look my best, and smile my sweetest, as you are pleased to call it, to-night, more than any other particular time?"

"Now fiddledumdee; grant me patience! Just fancy—*just fancy*, that a girl of your age should be so deceitful. I declare I am quite ashamed of you, Bertha Murray."

"Without a cause, then, Hetty, permit me to say."

"There you go again, Mrs. Morton. There's

no attempting to teach that girl how to behave, but you must take her part, right or wrong; for what reason could she ask me such a question, when she knows full well Greyling is coming to-night, if it was not to make me angry?"

"Dear Hetty, I have not the slightest wish to anger you, believe me," said Bertha, blushing to her fair temples; "but you know you scolded me the other morning for being what you called too agreeable."

"Agreeable, indeed! Yes, to waste time that might be so much better employed, in listening to, and answering a parcel of dull, stupid, unmeaning, downright, straightforward, wearying questions, about nothing and nobody, put by that ugliest, heaviest, most dunderheaded, unintellectual, unimaginative, unloveable of all human beings, Master Crawford Crumpish. You certainly must have been doing it in the very depth of irony, Bertha, for to tell me, that any young woman, however well disposed she may be, could sit for an entire hour, listening with a face of sympathy and attention to those hatefully long yarns, about a pack of made-up, incomprehensible rubbish, uttered by the puckered lips of such an old guy as that, saying she did so, because she *liked it*, is just what I don't, and won't believe, let her repeat the assertion as often as she may.

"Upon my word," said Mrs. Morton, laughing heartily, "'tis a thousand pities 'the old guy' cannot be made acquainted with the high estimation in which you hold him, Hetty; it would serve to make him more prosy and intolerable than ever!"

"Oh! I'm sure there can be no occasion for that, dear Mrs. Morton; and I am truly sorry. I was so completely innocent of the offence I was

giving, as not even to suspect I might be doing wrong. However, I shall know better another time."

"Yes, I hope you will, and keep your smiles for those who can appreciate them better. I had hoped you were above such coquetry."

"Well, of all things in life, Hetty, to accuse Bertha of coquetry! Now, I must say you are unjust."

"Perhaps I may be. I didn't mean to say that *exactly*, only I can't but feel provoked, when I see her so kind and conversable with such creatures of conceited stupidity, when there are dozens who would be made happy by an approving word."

"Dear Hetty, how you do run on. I cannot imagine for an instant, that the smiles or frowns, kind words, or cool replies, of such an insignificant country maiden as myself, can be sufficiently important to be made a subject for grave debate; and indeed I think——"

"Think nothing about the matter, Bertha—think nothing about the matter. You are very well as you are; and if you've got sense enough in your head just to keep it from being turned by all the adoration you receive," said Miss Bridgenorth, looking with affectionate admiration on the extremely beautiful face of her young friend, "you may think yourself well off, and no fool either."

"Thank you, Hetty," replied the sweet girl, smiling. "I am sure I ought to be very much obliged to you for your good opinion of me."

"No thanks at all, Miss, and no obligation, either; but if you do feel yourself indebted, you can easily rub out the score, by looking as pretty, and behaving as well as you possibly can this evening;" saying which, without waiting for a reply, the dear little soul darted out of the room

—skipped down three stairs at once—opened street door—slapped it after her, and was on way towards Madam Dormer's, before Dalrymple time to open his eyes, and rise from his cushioned chair, for the purpose of ascertaining what all the noise was about.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

As we fear some of our fair readers may feel disposed to look with rather a severe eye upon favourite, Bertha, thinking, in the kindness of their gentle hearts, that Botherem Banks, with his goggle eyes and short nankeens, was no altogether so utterly unloveable,—and that, had he been in her (Bertha's) place, they would have a better return for such devoted affection, nor a loving heart like his away in sorrow and dejection now, we say 'tis but justice to all parties, Miss Murray, to Botherem Banks, to the reader, and to ourselves, that we use our united endeavours to disabuse the mind of such an incorrect view of the case, and we see no surer or way in which that can be done, than by translating, faithfully and correctly, one of the numerous letters written by him, the said Botherem, his sister, during his sojourn on the bright shores of Sussex.

“BELOVED ESTHER,—Sweet sister of mine, it is now more than six months since, guided by thy wise counsel, I left my native

(then rendered hateful and abhorrent unto me by causes which I need not now recall) for the peaceful shades of this blessed Elysium. Ah, dearest sister! how greatly,—how wonderfully,—how surpassingly beyond all human thought,—all hope,—have I been enhanced by the happy, happy change.

“Surely, my Esther, I can never love thee enough; nor, should I live thrice Nestor’s life, repay thee all that bliss thou hast been the dear means of bestowing upon thy loving, grateful, happy, brother.

“Esther, beloved and honoured sister, I have at length found the woman intended by fate to be the sharer in, and enliverer of, all those joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, pains and pleasures, that make up the blessed existence of your now thrice happy brother Botherem.

“Yes, I have at last discovered that pearl of price, that beacon of love, that inestimable treasure, that sweet seraph, who shall guide my footsteps through the thorny paths of this wicked world, and conduct me in safety to the threshold of another and a better.

“Oh! shall I ever forget the thrilling moment in which my dazzled and enraptured eyes first beheld her fairy form! No, no,—while life lingers in this love-subdued bosom, there will dwell in all its pristine charms that bright impression her sweet image made.

“Yes, I found her seated like an empress surrounded by her slaves,—but no, I like not that high-flown courtly metaphor,—gentle Love dwells not in gilded palaces,—no, he seeketh out the lowly cottage and the humble roof,—yes, there it was I found him.

“Tell me, sister, why we call love *he*! surely

woman, timid, gentle, soft, confiding woman, *she* is love. Yes, my own beloved, adored, divine Selina, *she is love*; but to drop all metaphor, and speak in sober prose, I have to tell thee, dearest sister, when first my bewildered eyes encountered the bewitching gaze of this my soul's best idol, I beheld her, like Werter's interesting Charlotte, surrounded by a beauteous crowd of youthful innocents, her own fair brothers and sweet blooming sisters. She was engaged, not like hapless Werter's heart's bright Queen, in cutting brown bread and butter, but in what appeared to my wrapt sense a pastime of far greater worth,—the act of shelling pease!

“Oh, Esther! never since that happy day can I endure the sight or taste of any other vegetable than that gratefully palate pleasing dainty, the rich *green pea*; from henceforth be they named ‘King of greens,’ as my Selina's queen among her sex.

“The ancient *cuisiniere* of our reverend friend has pledged her word to preserve me some, and of the selfsame kind my charming mistress was so gracefully releasing from their prison house when first she dawned, all beauty, on her lover's sight.

“Yes, a rich store of those costly dainties are reserved for me, when other mortals, not so highly favoured shall look, and long in vain.

“You must behold my Selina ere you can guess, conceive, imagine, dream of half her loveliness, and to see her is to adore!

“Never before did I so fully appreciate, for never before did I so fully *know*, the great beauty of my own inspired muse,—never, till now, did I clearly understand the deep pathos, nor discover those million hidden graces with which my poems so abundantly abound; but here is the secret, sweet

sister,—I have now one continually by my side to cheer, to cherish, to smile, and to approve ; seated by her, labour is pastime, and sorrow is joy ; her presence converts the darkest gloom to brightest sunshine, her voice is music, her sweet smile is bliss.

“Perhaps, dear Esther, you are anxious to know the real name of my present charmer ?—listen and attend ! ‘Sally’ is the one she received at the baptismal font, but you are not ignorant concerning my intense affection for harmonious and euphonious appellatives, more particularly in the christian distinguishments of women. I have, as you already perceive, changed her original name to Selina, and so ever ready is she, this my heart’s best treasure, to fulfil my slightest wish, that she has gracefully consented to adopt the one her lover thoughtfully has substituted, and answers thereunto as though she ne’er had borne another.

“Give my best duty and affection to our honoured parent, and tell her I will write her ere long, but my time at present is so completely taken up and divided between love and the muses, that I have scarcely a moment left to spare.

“I am now preparing a collection of poems for the press ; they are to be dedicated to my Selina, and I have no doubt will create an immense sensation in the literary and fashionable world when they appear. Now I have a theme,—a soul-inspiring theme,—in the form of a being who is all sense and sensibility,—one who not only inspires my pen, but approves those outbursts of genius she herself has called to birth, my muse flows on in soft, smooth, rich, luxuriant streams, and my heart responds with joy and gratitude to that loved being who has made me what I am.



“ Oh, my Esther ! could you but behold me seated, like the blessed Arcadians of old, on some moss-grown bank, my arm encircling her slender waist, while her clear blue eye looks with love and wonder into mine, the flowers at our feet, and the poems on the green sod beside us ; surely, surely then would you say the days of innocence and pastoral happiness had once more returned to cheer and bless our earth !

“ I send you enclosed a copy of the verses I have written as a dedication to my forthcoming work ; they are addressed to my Selina, and as she has condescended to accord them her unlimited approbation, I doubt not of yours :—

Selina, loved one, fairest of thy race,  
Bedecked and blessed with more than mortal grace,  
See here a suppliant kneeling at thy feet,  
Love throbbing in his heart, as that heart's pulses beat

Deign but to listen,—scorn me not, sweet maid ;  
By one bright smile is my deep love repaid.  
Bid me live on, in thy hand is my fate,  
Say, ‘ Hope, my Botherem,’ ere it be too late.

Yes, I *will* hope, while love and life shall be  
Made tenfold blessed, dearest one, by thee ;  
My genius soars beyond my own control,—  
Big is my heart with love,—elated is my soul.

I envy not the monarch on his throne,  
Since thou consent'st, beloved, to be my own ;  
Here let me dwell,—here, happy, end my days,—  
Dreaming of thee, and basking in love's rays.

On thee, Selina, shall the world bestow  
All thanks and praises, fairest, when they know,  
To thee—and thee alone—that debt is due,  
Soulless had been my rhymes, if uninspired by you.

To thee, Selina, beautiful as good,  
To thee I dedicate my muse ; and should  
No voice but *thine* approve and laud these strains,  
Oh ! more than ample to reward my pains.

“ There, what think you of that, dear Esther ? are they not beautiful ? Do not, I entreat, shew them to any one, for as my work is to be entitled thus,—‘ The *Original* Outpourings of an Inspired Poet,’ I should not like them to be seen, until they appear in print, which, I trust, will be ere long.

“ Remember me most kindly to all inquiring friends, and, with much love and deep gratitude to your own dear self, duty, love, affection, and kisses to my mother and sisters, believe me to be, dearest Esther, your ever affectionate brother,

“ BOTHEREM BANKS.

“ *P. S.*—Do not fail to send me a pair or two of my *dress* nankeens. My Selina admires that style of apparel beyond all others, and as she invariably adopts my slightest wish as law, I should be much wanting, both in gallantry and a proper appreciation of her sensitively refined good taste, were I, for a single moment, ever to appear in a costume less graceful, or less according with my sweet angel’s chaste ideas of elegance and grace.

“ Strange to tell, dear sister, how rapidly those favoured garments run to waste. Methought you placed some eight or ten pairs in my travelling trunk, and now, sad to relate, I have but one remaining in a whole and perfect state.

“ I can account for their quick destruction in no other way than by assigning it to my present pastoral mode of life. The turf is not always velvet-

smooth, and perchance those small stones imbedded there among may assist, while I recline beneath some friendly shade, musing on beauty, love, and poetry, in furthering their, alas! too speedy dissolution.

"Be that as it may, my once ample wardrobe now runs distressingly low. Selina has, with bewitching kindness, and sweet modest condescension, more than once repaired the choicest of my stock, but still her lovely fingers cannot strengthen that which time has worn; and so, dear sister, think of my distress, nor fail to aid me in my time of need. Send them quickly, sister,—send them quickly, for much do I require them.

"BOTHEREM."

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

SHOULD any of our readers feel disappointed at the very small share of love (we mean *real love*, such love as existed between Felix Greyling and Bert Murray) to be found in these pages, we can on plead in excuse, that, as we are writing truth, and nothing but truth, we do not profess or pretend to have overheard all those many very dear and sweet conversations that occupied the happy mornings of our beautiful favourite, Bertha, and her handsome lover.

No; we have in our day hearkened complacently to a few tender speeches, and listened to a little love; but never once do we remember to have had such incense offered at our shrine when a *third* person was present.

Lovers *do not* encircle the slender waist, and snatch kisses from the rosy lips of their fair enslavers, while grandmamas and antique aunts sit by, smiling approval, or frowning dissent, as the case may be. Excellent Dame Shirley was doubtless a most desirable auxiliary in all those tender passages of Sir Charles Grandison's courtship. But such good days and ways are long past. Handsome wooers *can* look into fair ladies' eyes, and whisper soft nothings, even though left alone—ay, quite alone—with her he loves, unaided by the sage counsel and better experience of an Aunt Selby, or a Grandmamma Shirley.

Bertha Murray was one of those pure-minded, high-souled girls, who really scarcely understood what vanity and coquetry meant; and, though she could have had half the fashionable men in London at her feet, she treated them all with such frank, unaffected good humour, listening to their fine speeches with such perfect self-possession, that nine men out of ten, who attempted to address her in anything like the language of admiration and love, found themselves completely foiled. Bertha Murray never sighed, blushed, averted her head, dropped her eyelids, or tried to look agitated, because she might chance to catch the eye of some admiring swain, gazing in raptures on her lovely face! Bertha Murray very often blushed; indeed she was a great blusher, but she never *tried* to blush, that she might appear bashful and innocent. Bertha Murray was wholly, totally, every way ignorant of all those many winning, attractive little ways, which young ladies in general consider not only admissible but indispensable. She never for an instant imagined it to be elegant and refined to affect what she did not feel. Bertha Murray had no taste for counting

the patterns on her friends' carpets, that she give those friends an opportunity of admiring long eyelashes.

No one ever conversed with Bertha Murray out being struck by the clear, calm, beautiful, nest expression of her large dark intelligent eyes.

"I declare it is quite impossible," said Sir F. Follett one day, in conversation with Lord Mere, "ever attempting to utter anything one mean in the presence of that girl. I protest always appears to me as if she could read very thoughts. I have more than once fancied eyes had walked into my brain, and were travelling out at the back of my head!"

Bertha Murray had not a single particle of tation in her whole composition; and, when laughingly told Mrs. Morton she thought Sir Greyling, without any exception, the strangest haved man she had ever met with, she told unhesitating truth, without a shadow of mentiservation; but then, be it remembered, this story was made the morning after that eventful evening in which she had *first* beheld him—and certainly far less fastidious even than Bertha Murray might have been exonerated from the charge of duly giving way to a severity of thought and of unbecoming in a young and gentle maiden; certes, we must candidly own, the noble Felix not shew himself to the best advantage upon particular occasion; but *entre nous*, reader, we have an indistinct notion he rather gained than lost by making a bad impression, or, more properly, haps, it should be said, not a favourable one on his *first* introduction; for, when he left Mrs. Morton's house the following evening (they were when he called in the morning), Bertha frankly

plied to her friend's laughing question, as to what she thought of him *now*—

"I have changed my opinion."

"Ah!" replied Mrs. Morton, demurely, "I am rather glad of that, for I was beginning to fear I had gone down a great many steps in your estimation, for having ventured to like one so immeasurably beneath your notice."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Morton! how can you talk so! I am sure I did not say anything that was——"

"Oh, dear, no—not in the least, my love, I would not be so cruel as even to hint at the look you threw at me last night, leaving out altogether some part of our conversation over the breakfast table this morning; but then he did not make quite so many blunders, to be sure, this evening, as he did last, and there was a little more colour in his face. You very much dislike men with pale complexions, Miss Murray, do you not?"

"Now, really, Mrs. Morton, you are too bad."

"Indeed! You are exceedingly complimentary. I never deemed myself too *good*; but why, or for what reason, I should have become so desperately wicked all on a sudden, is a matter completely out of my power to comprehend."

"Dear Mrs. Morton," said Bertha, looking earnestly and imploringly at her friend, "don't quiz me about him, *pray* don't."

Mrs. Morton gazed at the sweet beseeching face before her for an instant, with a grave, searching look, and then said, "Bertha, *I will not*. From this moment the subject is sacred to me; it shall never be spoken lightly of again."

The fair girl rose from her seat, impressed a fervent kiss on her friend's cheek, and left the room without uttering another word.

How different, how far different, were those thoughts that came stealing over sweet Bertha's mind, as she laid her head on her pillow that night to what they were a few short hours before. She loved—and knew she was beloved in return. Of that blessed, exalted, rapturous first feeling—the knowledge that those we love, love us in return—and Bertha knew this; in her inmost heart she felt it.

What a strange overwhelming, bewildering, intoxicating sensation is the *first* feeling of love! Oh, *real*, unalterable, undying love! Such affection, as time, place, circumstances, nay, not even *crime* itself can change or weaken, thou art a strange wondrous, beautiful mystery!

Every succeeding day served to strengthen these blissful, happy, engrossing sentiments, that had sprung up in the heart of Bertha Murray. That she thought of Sir Felix Greyling as she had never thought of man before, she did not deny even to her own sweet self; and he, on his part absolutely adored her.

It is always the case with men of his temperament and disposition, who have reached the unchangeable age of thirty, without having met with her upon whom he could bestow his treasured affections, that when he does see the woman who realizes his then fastidious notions of what a woman should be, he loves with an absorbing intensity, that men who have loved early and often can never feel, and scarcely understand.

Let any woman, who is of a doubtful, or suspicious disposition, keep her affections until sought by a man of thirty, and she may be sure, when *he* has them they are safe. Very young men, however deeply they may fancy their hearts enthralled, how-

ever solemnly they may have sworn fidelity, however certain they may feel in their own minds that the love they then bear, to her they have vowed vows of unalterable constancy to, will cease but with their existence, can be, and *are* easily led away, and soon forget in gayer scenes, amid fascinating company, surrounded by fairer faces, and more alluring manners, that gentle, confiding creature, who seeing, loved; who listening, believed; and, believing, would not doubt, until the cruel certainty was forced upon her; and then, poor girl, alas for her! she found she loved not wisely, but too well!

Old men are less to be trusted than young ones. An old man is easily *flattered* into love. She who is the most artful is sure to win him; but if one stronger in that power than she comes to dispute the sovereign sway, the last enchantress is forgotten—the new enslaver now is only thought of, until another mightier than she cometh—then the adored of yesterday is the aversion of to-day, and so on, until he, who has left and slighted so many, is at last left and slighted by all. She who would understand what such love is, must read Cowley's *Chronicle*.

Now, all these dangers cannot befall a man at the age of which we speak; he is too old to be won by a pretty face, and too young to be entrapped by a smooth tongue.

How highly diverting is it to watch the manœuvring attacks made upon such a man—more especially should he chance to be rich and handsome—by a woman a few years his senior, who is bent upon winning him, whether he will or no.

The more fascinating, soft, and subdued she becomes, the more cold, reserved, and unmanage-



able does he; she smiles sweetly—he laughs out loudly; she plays with her nosegay, or tears her gloves—he goes to the glass and arranges his cravat, or sets his curls in order; she looks up hesitatingly from under her eyelids—he stares down boldly with his eyes wide open; she sighs—~~she~~ hums; she murmurs forth some kind inquiry—~~she~~ replies in a clear distinct voice—“I beg your pardon, I did not hear you;” and after having endured the *show* as long as it suits his convenience, takes a frank leave of the fair Machiavel, to seek her from whom no blandishments can win him.

Until the moment in which Sir Felix Greyling first beheld Bertha Murray, he had not only never loved, but never even *fancied* he loved; and the sensation was so new, so absorbing, so wholly overpowering, that he felt like one entranced; ~~no~~ is it to be wondered at: the affections of such a man as Sir Felix Greyling, so long pent up, as strong, so ardent, so unimpaired, when at length they do find an object upon which to fix themselves, love with an intensity no other age can feel.

According to Colonel Arburthnott's prognostications, long before six months were expired, the handsome Sir Felix Greyling had wooed and won the beautiful Bertha Murray.

Oh! what rueful looks and sullen replies greeted that triumphal announcement, made by the good-natured colonel, of his prediction's fulfilment.

“I don't believe a word about the matter,” growled Frederick Langford. “It's only a *far* got up by Arburthnott to torment us; I haven't given up all hopes yet, I can tell you.”

“Nor I neither,” said Arthur Stapleton. “Let

Arburthnott be as positive as he may; and hang me, if I don't ask her this very evening."

"Do," laughed Sir Charles Lumley; "do Stalton—I admire your spirit; but I should not like to be in your shoes when the answer is given."

"And pray why not?"

"Because I hate being said nay unto."

"Don't make quite so certain I shall be said nay unto, Sir Charles Lumley," replied the beau, contentedly.

"Humph! Oh!" said Sir Charles.

"I think there has been a vast deal more fuss made about that girl," observed Sir Henry Follett, sullenly, "than—than there need have been."

"You did not think so a fortnight ago, Follett," laughed Colonel Arburthnott.

"Why; was not *I* the first to tell you you were talking a parcel of nonsense, when you came in here the morning after you had seen her at Lady Malcolm's party, raving about her perfections, and all that sort of stuff?"

"Ay, ay; but have the goodness to remember *I* had seen her, and *you* had not."

"Pshaw!"

"I say Follett——"

But Follett, who had a kind of vague notion that gentlemen do not present choice flowers to fair ladies, watch under windows, linger about in doorways, send letters full of love, with various other unequivocal demonstrations, if they *really* think that praises spoken in favour of the lady in question is "all stuff," and calling to mind at the same time how frequently such offerings had been laid on the shrine of Bertha Murray, by Sir Henry Follett, the said Sir Henry wisely judged it prudent to avoid

anything that might lead to cross-questioning, sort of torture by the way, few people would willingly expose themselves to;) so, acting according to this shrewd guess of what would be most likely to relieve him from interrogatories he felt little disposed to answer, the choleric baronet seized his hat and departed in wrathful indignation.

As it has been before observed, we have purposely avoided intruding any of those scenes upon the reader, which, though very dear to the parties themselves, can scarcely be expected to interest another. However, as we presented Sir Felix all the absurdity of his first introduction, it seemed but justice to let him speak for himself, the first time he ever beheld his gentle Bertha in that room where his enraptured senses first drank in the blessed certainty that he was beloved.

"I fear I must leave you, dearest, a day earlier than I had thought," said Sir Felix, passing his arm round her sylph-like waist, and gazing fondly in her sweet eyes.

"Must you?" replied Bertha, sadly. "I am so fond of that—when do you go?"

"To-morrow, love; I have just received a letter from my poor old guardian,"—here a painful expression shot athwart the countenance of Sir Felix—"for whom I ever felt the highest esteem and affection, telling me that his complaint is making such fearful inroads upon his constitution, that I do not come to him immediately, in all probability I may never see him alive again."

"Poor old man! then do not delay; it would be terrible for him to die without seeing you."

"Yes, it would, indeed; but still 'tis hard to go," said Sir Felix, drawing the fair girl yet closer to his side.

"Your father died when you were very young, did he not?"

"Yes," replied Sir Felix, huskily, while a trembling seemed to seize his whole frame.

"Dear Felix, what is the matter?" asked Bertha, in anxious alarm; "you are surely not well."

"Nothing, love—it is past now," replied he, by a violent effort stilling the agitation that had shook him thus fearfully. "Do not look so terrified, dearest, or you will make me miserable."

"There," said Bertha, smiling one of her sweetest smiles—"do I vex you now?"

"Bertha, you are an angel," murmured her lover, imprinting a fond kiss on her blushing cheek; "'tis misery to part with you—I cannot go!"

"Nay, nay, Felix, do not say so; think of the painful watching, the heavy hours that lag by, the doubts, hopes and fears of one in the state you describe that poor old man to be, when anxiously waiting for those they hold dear, and dreading lest death should carry them off ere the beloved friend shall arrive to receive their last look and blessing! Go," cried she, earnestly, while her beautiful eyes filled with tears at the picture of suffering she herself had drawn,—“go, dear Felix; you would never forgive yourself should this friend and protector of your youth die, and you far away.”

"I will go, Bertha," said Sir Felix, in a low, deep voice, folding her to his bosom; "I will go, but——"

"Felix, promise me you will not leave him until he is either better or——"

"I understand what you would say—it shall be as you wish, love."

"Thank you, dear Felix, as much for myself as your own sake. I know full well, that should he

die ere you reached Italy—and you feel conscious hereafter that had it not been for delay you might have seen him alive—the conviction would cause you much sorrow; and do you think I could be happy when I knew you had cause for grief?”

“My own best love! was man ever so blessed! Oh, Bertha! the more you urge me to leave you, the more painful appears the trial; every word you utter serves but to make the thoughts of parting from you less endurable—I cannot go.”

“Dear Felix, I cannot endure to hear you talk so; it appears like want of firmness and resolution—what would you do were you placed as Augustus is?—compelled to obey the command that called him at a minute’s notice, whether he likes it or not.”

“Your brother must be a noble ornament to his profession; if he is as amiable in private life as he is brave and honourable in public, he fully deserves those high praises he receives from all quarters. Are you reckoned alike? I have heard Captain Murray called splendidly handsome.”

“Why, really I should be guilty of great vanity and presumption to answer ‘Yes’ after the remarks you have just made; but I must own people have flattered me so far as to say they can trace a resemblance, though I dare not be conceited enough to fancy so myself—Augustus is certainly very, very handsome.”

“Then there can be no doubt of a likeness, and a strong one too, sweet Bertha,” said her lover, looking exultingly at his beautiful betrothed; “but surely your brother is much older than yourself, or he must be an exceedingly young officer to have so important a command.”

“Six years. Augustus is just five-and-twenty;—

he was but two months old when my father and mother left England. I was born in India."

"A fair Indian!" said Sir Felix, kissing the soft, fairy-like, beautiful little dimpled, pink and white hand that lay within his own. "A pearl indeed!"

"Oh! I dare say I should have caught a shade or two more from the eastern sun, had I been kept there a little longer; but my father died before I was two years old, and mamma returned to England immediately after his death, so you see I had no opportunity of becoming a Cleopatra, even could I have been precocious enough to understand the value of a dark skin, and sighed to be like brave Anthony's bright love!"

"Anthony's taste must have been very different from mine," said Sir Felix, playing with one of Bertha's long, lovely, glossy, soft, auburn ringlets. "I hate brown skins, and fierce black eyes; beetle brows and olive complexion look very well on a man's face, but to be feminine in appearance, a woman must be fair!"

"Oh, don't say so! I think some of the most beautiful women are the darkest. What can be more lovely than a really pretty brunette?"

"Perhaps so, dearest; but I candidly confess black eyes never had charms for me," said Sir Felix, gazing intently into the sweet pair beside him. "I—"

"It was summer; so sweetly the breezes were blowing,"

sang a funny, merry little voice, on the stairs.

"There is Hetty," exclaimed Bertha, starting up, and hurryingly turning over the leaves of every book within reach, that lay on a table close by,

without very clearly understanding why or for what she had commenced her diligent search. "I dare say she wants me."

"No, no, love, she don't—sit down again, dear," said Sir Felix, rising and beginning the same important scrutiny that Bertha was so indefatigably employed upon, with precisely the same aim and end—that is to say, neither of them knowing at all what they were about, though seeming so deeply absorbed in the pursuit of knowledge.

"Goodness me, yes; that's precisely what I expected," laughed the little woman, opening the door. "How do you like my singing this morning, Sir Felix Greyling? Don't you think my voice is particularly clear and distinct to-day? By the way, do you understand aught concerning ornithology, Felix Greyling?"

"Ornithology, Miss Bridgenorth! why what is the name of common sense do you mean by asking such a question as that, just now?"

"That is it, precisely—I mean *common sense*—and nothing else; so I put the same simple interrogatory again. Do you understand anything about ornithology?"

"Truly my knowledge in that branch of zoology is somewhat limited, I am compelled honestly to confess, though I have not the slightest objection to receive a few lessons from so accomplished a disciple of the learned George Edwards, or dear worthy Oliver's indispensable friend—the great Count de Buffon."

"Oh, no! I want no such mighty authority as the learned George Edwards, the travelled Buffon, or the painstaking Goldsmith. I only wish to give you a few hints on that science, (if it is a

science,) drawn from my own personal observation, which is neither more nor less than this—

“Never approach a *dove-cot too suddenly*; always give some intimation to those within that you are coming; for should you appear before the loving innocents without warning, you terrify them sadly, making them look as if they had been guilty of kissing, when, in reality, they had only been cooing.”

“You most impertinent woman!” said Sir Felix, laughing, though not a very *bold* laugh. “You shall be both guilty and punished too; then you can’t complain of those who are not half so bad as yourself—there now!” cried he, giving her a hearty salute—“there now! what do you say to that?”

“Why you abominably, inconceivably, atrociously good-for-nothing creature!” exclaimed the discomfited Hetty, settling her disarranged collar with one hand, while with the other she attempted to reach Sir Felix’s face, for the very laudable purpose of being summarily revenged, by giving him a hearty box on the ears; but as that was entirely beyond her power, she contented herself by saying, with as spiteful an air as she could assume—“Oh! I dare say it is not the *first* kiss you have had this morning by many.”

“Her majesty the queen is in a passion,” laughed Sir Felix.

“Be she, or be she not, who cares? I’ll be bound Miss Bertha there is ready to chime in.”

“No, indeed, I am not, dear Hetty; for I think he has behaved exceedingly ill to you.”

“To *you*, you mean, miss! and instead of standing there, blushing and looking like any goose, why don’t you come and help me to scold him.”



"I will, if you will tell me what to say."

"Oh, fiddledumdee! Just fancy such nonsense! How I do hate to see people making I—o—lo—that is to say, you shall not stay here any longer, Sir Felix Greyling; you must go home directly, yes, *directly*; do you hear?"

"Truly, I do. Must I—why?"

"Why? Why, because, in the first place, I command you, and in the next, I tell you they have been sending after you a dozen times; there's been that fierce-looking Heinsius (what a queer name for a servant!) here, three times, demanding to see his master, upon particular business. I did not like to send any of the domestics in, because I thought about what I've just told you; and I was afraid to come myself, lest I should catch what I've got—more than I like."

"Did Heinsius leave any message?"

"No; he said he wanted to tell you something about somebody who had been waiting since ten o'clock, but I don't remember what."

"Oh, to be sure! I recollect now, though I had entirely forgotten the matter, altogether."

"Dare say you had! Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

"Not at all," replied Sir Felix, laughing; "no at all, my dear Miss Bridgenorth; I would neglect the most important business, casting it into utter oblivion, let it be ever so urgent, for the sake of getting such a sweet kiss as you gave me just now."

"I gave you! Just fancy! Well, I shall be most particularly glad when you're fairly gone, that's certain; and remember you shall go straight to Darcey Hall, when you come back from Italy, mine"

that! Don't come here; I won't be tormented by you any more."

"Well, then; I suppose you mean I'm always to pay my visits in Fenmore Place.

"I'll not forget, depend upon it. Certainly your drawing-room is one of the most perfectly beautiful apartments I know, and——"

"Oh, I wish Mrs. Morton was here to scold you! You are the only person in this world who always has the best of every argument or conversation I ever start, let it be what it may. Just fancy that any one should be so impertinent!

"Well, well; don't you leave the house till I come back again; I'm only going to see if Mrs. Morton has returned.

"Heaven bless them!" said the little woman, as she trotted up-stairs again. "Heaven bless them! they are a sweet pair; they were certainly born for each other; they are too beautiful and good to be matched by any but themselves. I don't know which I love best, I'm sure I don't. Did ever any breathing creature look half so lovely as Bertha does this morning? and I do really think Felix grows handsomer every time I see him. I do love them dearly, and that's the truth!"

We will not again intrude upon the *affectionné* occupants of Mrs. Morton's drawing-room, but simply inform our kind readers, that it was arranged Sir Felix should come to Darcey Hall, immediately on his return from Italy, seeking the consent of her parents to claim his adored Bertha as his own, which said arrangement took up somewhat more than three hours from the time when Miss Bridgenorth left them, and it was not until the dinner-bell roused them from their pleasing

visions of future happiness, that Sir Felix Greyling remembered he ought to have been at his own house, for the purpose of settling some really urgent business, exactly seven hours before!

Surely it must have taken the counsel of many sage heads in days of yore, ere they decided upon making so truly perfect a personification of love as Dan Cupid. Blind he is, indeed; but, oh, how swift!

"Well, patience is a virtue, which, I'm sure, I've practised to-day, at all events," grunted Mr. Bagle, thrusting his hands, up to the elbows, into his capacious breeches' pockets, and looking out, for the thousandth time, to see if Sir Felix was coming. "He's too good a client to run the risk of offending but he's the only man living I'd have waited for from ten o'clock in the morning till near six in the afternoon; hang me, if he ar'n't! and I dare say after all, 'tis only to tell me to pay the costs for those vagabonds I prosecuted, and who were cast for tearing down his park wall. Bless the man I'm sure he has more money than wits. I suppose next he'll let all his tenants live rent free. Well, that's *his* business, not *mine*. So long as I fill my pockets, that's all I care about."

## CHAPTER XIX.

"BERTHA," said Mr. Darcey, entering the breakfast-parlour with an open letter in his hand, and that look of agony which had at times so fearfully alarmed both Mrs. Darcey and her daughter, convulsing his features—"Bertha, the hour has at

last arrived, that for years,—oh, God!—years of such intense misery, I have so dreaded; but it *has* come, and my fate lies in your hands. Speak, Bertha; for upon your answer hangs life, or death, blasting dishonour, or——”

“Dear sir, in mercy’s name, what is the matter?” exclaimed Bertha, trembling with terror, as she looked at the haggard and wild face before her. “Do, I intreat you, endeavour to calm yourself. What can have happened to agitate you thus, dear father?” continued the affectionate girl, taking his hand, and drawing him towards a sofa; “tell me, what makes you so distressed? If I cannot alleviate your sorrows, at least I can share them; it is dreadful to see you suffer so; let me call my mother.”

“No, no,” gasped Mr. Darcey, sinking on a seat beside him; “no, if you would not drive me distracted. Have pity on me, Father of Heaven! The dreaded hour has come, and all must be known. Oh, guilt, guilt! Who would sin, if they could but guess the terrible, terrible penalty of crime?” And the strong man shook like a sickly infant, as thoughts and scenes of bygone crime and misery came crowding, like hideous phantoms, on his throbbing brain, almost scaring reason from her empire.

“Water!” said the wretched man, raising his head from the arm of the sofa; “my heart feels as if it were bursting, and my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth; bring me a glass of water, dear Bertha; fetch it yourself, for I would not have other eyes look upon me now! I fear I have scarcely strength to go through the dreadful trial,” murmured he, as Bertha left the room; “but it must be done; I *must* tell her all—all!” and again he groaned aloud.

“Merciful Father! thy will be done! Perhaps I shall feel more at peace when I have unburdened my

heart of this fearful load. Sinner, hypocrite, deceiver, that I am ! I, the respected, the honoured, the almost *envied* of all who know me ; ay, all who know me *now*. Am I not the wealthy, generous, charitable Mr. Darcey, the kind landlord, the good,—aha ! aha ! *good*, that is what they call me,—*good* Mr. Darcey ;” and, repeating the last word several times, he sank back exhausted, uttering a low, deep scornful, derisive laugh.

“ Bertha,” said he, abruptly, as the fair girl re-entered the room, with a glass of water in her hand, “ Sir Felix Greyling has returned from Italy.”

“ Yes, dear sir,” replied she, blushing ; “ so he tells me in a letter I received this morning.”

“ And will he be here in a few days ? Did he tell you that also ?”

“ Yes.”

“ And you have given him permission ?” said Mr. Darcey, in a low, hollow voice ; at the same time fixing a wild, searching, terrified glance upon poor Bertha ; “ you have given him permission to come, that you may both exult over the dying miseries of his hated foe ? No, no !” exclaimed he, fiercely ; “ *that* shall never be ! rather than meet him face to face, my own hand shall put an end to this loathed existence ! Felix Greyling, I will balk you of your vengeance,—your fearful vow shall never be fulfilled ! Aha ! aha ! Why did I not think of this before ?” And again he laughed loud and wildly.

“ Father,” said Bertha, gently placing her hand upon his arm, and looking pleadingly into his face ; “ father, dear father, why is this ?—what mean you ? I cannot comprehend it. Surely you are not speaking of Sir Felix Greyling, when you talk of your mortal foe ?”

"Forgive me, forgive me, dear child!" cried he, sinking on his knees at the bewildered Bertha's feet, and holding out his clasped hands imploringly towards her; "you must hate me; all who know me must hate and despise me; but have pity on me, Bertha, have pity on me; as you hope for mercy hereafter, and would not see me commit a fearful act of suicide, do not allow Sir Felix Greyling to torture the last few months of my miserable life, by his dreaded presence."

"Father," said Bertha, solemnly, "rather than see you suffer in this fearful way, I would renounce Sir Felix Greyling for ever, and swear never to behold him more! And as the fair girl uttered these words, large scalding tears rolled heavily down her sweet face, while her whole frame shook with agony. "Rise, father! I implore you; let me hear your reasons for thus dreading the presence of Sir Felix Greyling, and if they prove sufficiently strong, I will do as I have just said."

(Dear Bertha, she could not bring herself to *repeat* those terrible words, "renounce him for ever!" —*how terrible!* the heart that has loved like hers can full well understand.)

"I fear I cannot do it, Bertha," said the unhappy man, rising from his knees; "the torture would be greater than my strength could bear, and yet it *must* be done."

"Tell me but that which refers to Sir Felix Greyling," said Bertha, placing herself by Mr. Darcey's side, and speaking in a low, distinct, impressive voice; "I must know all that could throw a shadow of doubt around *him*,—all, everything," continued she, looking earnestly into her father's face; "you owe it me, and I will not give my promise, until I feel I am justified in so doing."

Oh, Felix !" murmured the poor girl, " I fear there is a terrible trial in store for us both. Dear father," said she, endeavouring to soothe the excessive agitation under which Mr. Darcey was actually writhing, " I fear I have spoken almost unkindly, but, remember, I plead for one who——"

" Yes, yes, Bertha—it shall be done ; you say truly I owe it to you ; but remember, my child, it is *I*, and I alone, who have sinned. Sir Felix Greyling is all that is honourable, all that man should be ; and I,—how deeply have I wronged him !"

" You, *you* wronged Sir Felix Greyling ?" said Bertha, drawing her breath hard, and shuddering ; " how can that be ? I cannot understand it."

" Have you resolution to listen to what I see 'tis hopeless attempting any longer to keep from you ? All must be known ere long, and the sooner my miserable heart is relieved of its terrible mystery, the better shall I be able to prepare for that death I feel is approaching me with rapid strides ! Promise me one thing, Bertha ; promise me, that when my tale is told, however you may loath and despise, you will not desert me, as one utterly unworthy even of pity ; much as I have suffered, that would be a stroke I should sink under. Promise me," repeated he, gazing into her eyes, with a wild earnestness, " that however frightful my crimes may appear, you will not leave me in contempt and abhorrence."

" Dear sir, how can you suffer such thoughts to dwell on you for a moment ? Have you not always acted towards me as the kindest, most beloved of fathers ? and can you think that I, who love you with all a fond daughter's warmest affections, could desert you in your hour of need ? Think better,

dear father, of your own Bertha," continued the gentle girl, drawing still closer to his side, and taking one of his feverish hands within her own. "Begin your story, and look for nothing but sympathy from me. If you have sinned, as your words imply, you have suffered,—ah, how deeply! and surely you cannot do me so much injustice as to imagine I could shut my heart against sorrows such as yours."

"Sweet child! May every blessing Heaven has in store for the good be showered down on thy beauteous head! I feel like a vile, polluted outcast, standing in the presence of some ministering and pitying angel. Oh, if that pure spirit should turn with horror from me!"

"Nay, nay, father; I beseech you talk not so. You have prepared me for a tale of crime and misery, and rest well assured, however deep the sins you charge yourself with may be, not one particle of my affection for you will it shake or lessen. Woman's love is not so easily turned aside: you have ever looked upon me as a daughter; think you, would a daughter despise a dear father, because she chanced to hear, that in his youth, designing and evil men had led him astray, and caused him to commit such wrong as his soul shuddered at? No, father!" cried she, eagerly, "you know full well it could not be; and firmly am I convinced, that where you have erred, others are more to blame than yourself; if you have sinned, great must have been the temptation. I cannot, will not believe, you ever to have been guilty of *premeditated crime*."

"Sweet child! your innocent heart guesses not at those enormities men are capable of when they once give loose to their evil passions. Till I was



four-and-twenty, I dreamed not that such a thing as dishonour existed among gentlemen ; then, indeed, having run through my small patrimony, and being fearfully in debt, by thoughtlessly lavishing my little fortune upon those who made it the business of their lives to flatter and encourage me in all my follies, I began by trying to discover how it was, that many, who I well knew possessed little beyond what they were indebted to the purses of others, for, could live in style and seeming affluence, while I had not a shilling in the world, and owed more, much more, than I knew I should ever be able to pay, at least, with the prospects I then had.

“ Unfortunately, most unfortunately for me, I was at that time what the world calls handsome, and being possessed of a remarkably fine voice, with the gay winning manners so well fitted to make friends, I was admired and courted. Invitations strewed my table every morning, and parties of pleasure were continually being formed for the express purpose of shewing up the ‘handsome Harry Mountmorris,’ as I was absurdly called.

“ Dear Bertha, how paltry must the mention of such folly appear to you ; but I cannot pass it over, for from those very causes sprang all my sin and misery. Very young men are seldom proof against the blandishments and enticements of fashionable life, more especially when they feel themselves of consequence in society ; and so it was with me : I had not sufficient resolution to withdraw myself from companions who flattered and courted me, while they were leading me into every species of folly and reckless extravagance.

“ About this time I became acquainted with a young Neapolitan nobleman—a god in form, a demon in heart. I knew him to be wretchedly poor,

and yet no man kept up a more splendid external appearance. He gave magnificent dinners; his house was superb; and his equipage vied with those of princes. That there was something wrong, I felt convinced. I observed him narrowly, and at last discovered his villany.

"Oh, the horror I conceived of that man! For months I shunned him as I would have done a leper. But he watched his opportunity. He was well aware how terribly I had run myself in debt to the Jew money-lenders, and knew that a prison stared me in the face.

"One day, while riding in the park with a party of gay friends, I was suddenly thrown from my horse, and dislocated my ankle. He happened to be passing in his carriage at the time, and insisted upon my being lifted in; and as the fall had stunned me, of course I was wholly unconscious of all that took place, until I opened my eyes in one of his luxurious drawing-rooms. I demanded to be immediately taken home, but the surgeon in attendance, (who was, doubtless, instructed in the part he had to play,) declared my injury so severe, that, should I be removed in the state I then was, he would not answer for consequences, as the least exertion would bring on fever. I certainly suffered excruciating pain for several days, and I am convinced he did all in his power to increase, rather than diminish that suffering. In the meantime, my host used every endeavour to win back my good opinion. Had he been my own brother, he could not have tended me with greater kindness and seeming regard. No man ever possessed a more pleasing manner, or a larger share of winning eloquence, than Leonardo Verrochio, and fearfully did he exert it, alas! alas! to my utter destruction!

"I cannot dwell upon all the subtle arguments he made use of," continued Mr. Darcey, after a pause, in which one of those violent fits of almost frenzied agitation shook his exhausted frame, till it left him as helpless as an infant, and made Bertha fear even for his life; "it is enough to tell, that, by artfully working upon my imagination, and pointing out, with a painful minuteness, the precipice upon which I stood, and the utter disgrace I must bring upon myself, and all belonging to me, should the entire wreck of my fortune be known, or, what was yet still worse, the fearful amount of debts I had contracted without the most remote chance of liquidating them. 'There is but one of two things left for you, Mountmorris,' he would say, 'a prison or——' Spare me, Bertha," cried the miserable man, burying his face in the cushions of the sofa, "do not look at me while I utter that frightful word!"

"Hush! father, I can understand you," said Bertha, hurriedly, her lips and face blanched white with horror. "Go on, name it not; I guess what you would say."

"It should seem strange, almost inexplicable, that I could find none but my best, my dearest friend, to practise this dark disgraceful villany upon; but I thought not of that, or, if I thought at all, it was only to remember his wealth, and that he was one of the most unsuspecting beings in existence.

"The tempter stood at my elbow. Oh, God! shall I ever forget the thrill of horror that seized my trembling frame, as I took those false dice from the wretch's hand! My brain reeled, a thick mist seemed to gather before my eyes; for the moment, I felt like one stunned, but by a violent effort I recovered my self-possession—and threw!

“ Our stakes were high, far higher than I had ever played before. I won all. Of course my adversary had no chance against me. We continued playing long after midnight. I had robbed him—ay, robbed him—of all the gold and notes he had about him, when, as I was reaching over to gather up the last ten sovereigns he was drawing from his purse, I dropped one of the dice I held concealed in the palm of my hand. It was his turn to throw; and before I had time to discover my fatal mistake, he turned the box down, and there lay *three* dice upon the board.

“ ‘How is this!’ exclaimed he, starting up, and seizing the one I had dropped, ‘By heaven and earth, there is villany here!’ saying which, he grasped the poker, and with one blow dashed the false dice to atoms. ‘By all that is infamous! it is *loaded*!’ shouted he. ‘Mountmorris!’ he cried, turning fiercely round upon me, ‘you are a villain! a scoundrel! and a disgrace to the name of gentleman!’

“ ‘Say you so!’ replied I, furiously, shaking from head to foot with rage and shame, ‘say you so! Then take that for my answer’—and I struck him, Bertha! Yes! I struck him a disgraceful blow! Merciful Father! the horrid scene rushes back upon my tortured memory, as though it had been enacted but yesterday. Oh, that I had died on the moment!

“ We had both been drinking freely, and our passions were roused to the highest pitch. I was almost delirious with fury, shame, and wine; but the instant I had dealt that hateful blow, a film appeared to fall from my eyes, and I saw with agony the fearful precipice upon which I stood. A chasm seemed to yawn before me; the hideous deformity

of those dark acts I had committed within the last few hours, prompted by that friend, who, demon-like, lured me on to destruction, and stood exulting in the misery he had caused, rushed with maddening distinctness upon my fevered brain.

“ ‘You discovered my secret,’ said Verrochio, in a hissing whisper, close to my ear, ‘and I swore a solemn oath you should not escape me! Have I not kept my vow? Farewell! my revenge is satisfied; I trust we shall never meet again,’ and bursting into a hellish laugh, he left the room.

“ Merciful Providence! there I stood, a blasted thing, hurled from my high estate, to become a murderer, and an outcast—for what? To gratify the deadly vengeance of a devil in human shape.

“ Oh, Bertha! I would not live over those few hours again, for the hopes of an eternity of happiness! What followed was but a continuation of misery. That one evening had changed me, from a gay, light-hearted, honourable being, like your brother, to the crime-stained, wretched, woe-worn creature you now behold me.

“ Yes, I first robbed, and then insultingly struck the dearest, most generous friend man ever had, ungrateful monster that I was. I felt like one transfixed with horror, and stood gazing on him I had so deeply injured, harrowed up with an overwhelming sense of my own infamy. Worlds would I have given to have dropped on my knees at his feet, and implored his pardon in the most abject language my tongue could have uttered; but no, that might not be, nothing less than the life of one, or both, could wash out such deep disgrace. We met—and he fell!—fell by the hand that had so often clasped his, in all the warmth of affection and tried friendship.

"Bertha, I became a murderer! Ay, I took the life of him who, from my earliest childhood I had loved as a dear, dear brother! Can there be pardon for crimes like mine?"

"I fled from my country, and became an outcast. I prayed for death, and spread a report that I had been drowned. I was soon forgotten by all my former friends and acquaintances. Doubtless, some strange wild stories were told about his death, and my flight; but such things are not long remembered by those who have no concern or interest in the transaction. A duel and its terrible consequences are thought little of, beyond serving the purpose of making a piece of fashionable gossip, for a few days, or weeks, and then all connected with the matter is forgotten, as if it had never been.

"After having travelled over the greater part of Europe, in that most hopeless and pitiable endeavour, which the wretched so often try, and so invariably find unavailing, of getting rid of their misery by change and excitement, I took up my residence, in gloomy despair, at an obscure village in the north of Wales.

"I had lived in almost utter poverty and want for more than eight years, in a wretched hovel, on the borders of Caernarvonshire, when one day, by a strange accident, I read in an English newspaper, the death of an uncle, and an advertisement for his heir.

"I repaired to London, and, having fully satisfied the trustees of my identity, I was put into quiet possession of all his immense wealth, with no other restriction than that of changing my name to the one borne by him whose vast riches I inherited; this, you can well imagine, I eagerly consented to. The thoughts of lawfully getting rid of

my then hated name brought something like a momentary pleasure to my crushed heart ; and, as the property left me was wholly funded, I determined to purchase an estate as far from London as I possibly could. I resolved never to visit the metropolis again, and sought for a place which I considered the least likely to be visited by any of my former fashionable associates. Most fortunately, just as I had begun to despair of meeting with anything that suited my views, this beautiful residence was offered for sale. I eagerly became a purchaser, and instantly set about making large improvements and alterations. I cannot but look back with amazement at the extraordinary infatuation that could lead me to imagine employment would have power to soothe and soften the stings of a conscience burdened and weighed down by crimes such as those I had committed. Soon, too soon, alas ! I found out my mistake.

“ After a few months of active, nay, almost ceaseless exertion, I again relapsed into my former state of inactivity, and was fast sinking into a gloomy misanthrope. For two years I shut myself up within the walls of my own house, entirely excluded from all communication with my fellow-men. About this time a dangerous illness seized me, and Doctor Latimer was called to attend me. Dear, kind old man, with what care and affection he watched over me ! He soon perceived that all was not peace within—that his patient’s sufferings were of the mind, rather than the body—and set himself to work a cure for both. Good, worthy, excellent creature, how little did he guess, in the pure simplicity of his guileless heart, the deep guilt of him who lay for hours and days together, silent and helpless as an infant, nor dreamed that under

an exterior so calm and apathetic, the torturing fires of a never-dying conscience were racking the heart, and fevering the brain of his docile patient ! He saw I was unhappy, but little suspected how crime-stained a wretch he was tending with such devoted, unwearying attention.

“ My illness was long and severe. For months I hovered between life and death, but at length, aided by a naturally good constitution, and the doctor’s skill, I slowly recovered.

“ One day, in course of conversation, he chanced to mention your mother’s name, she had lost her husband, he told me, and was living with her two children but a short distance from the Hall.

“ Strange—how strange are those sudden revolutions of our feelings ! I listened eagerly to all he knew about her, asked a thousand questions, and then made him repeat over all he had told me again and again.

“ A new existence appeared to be opening to me—that she whom I had loved with all the pure, intense devotion of a first affection,—she who had been torn from me and given to another,—she over whose loss I had mourned as one mourns for the dead, should now be free and living within an hour’s walk of my own dwelling, was joy almost too much for me to bear. I thought happiness was yet in store for me, but it proved bitter, bitter woe.

“ I sought her out, offered her my hand and fortune, and was accepted.

“ I hoped that by making my wealth the means of alleviating the wants and sorrows of my fellow-creatures, and devoting my time to promote the happiness of your beloved mother and her children, that some portion of the consuming misery which



for years had racked me might be spared—that occupation and a close attention to all those duties I felt it incumbent upon me to discharge, might break the maddening chain of ceaseless wretchedness by which life itself had been made a burden almost too great for endurance; but, alas, alas! what shall assuage or soften the scorching agony of a heart writhing beneath the tortures of an upbraiding conscience?

“All, everything that would have been productive of happiness to another, brought but suffering to me. The sweet, soft, smile of your gentle mother tormented me,—none can smile as she *once* used to smile, but those whose hearts and thoughts are free and pure. Her very happiness was a kind of reproof to me—I liked not to see her gay; that devoted affection and confiding love, that utter absence of suspicion, which in itself is so beautiful, was to me as wormwood; it embittered my existence, and added tenfold to my already overflowing cup of misery. I lived in continual dread, lest, by some unforeseen chance, the whole of my past life should come to her knowledge, for she never knew me but as one who might dare to walk with an unblushing face in the open light of day; those crimes I so foully committed were wholly unguessed at by her; she had gone to India shortly after her marriage, and only returned to England a few years before I settled at Darcey Hall.

“That love I could not doubt, and which, amid all my wanderings, had been the one only thought to which I could turn for consolation through long years of hopeless misery, might be turned in a single hour to scorn and hate! Now, when it was too late, how severely did I upbraid myself for the blind folly that had prompted me to act so cruelly.

"Often, when tortured by a contemplation of that utter wretchedness the discovery of my iniquities must bring to us both, have I dashed like a maniac from her side, and prowled, in a state of indescribable horror, among the woods that surrounded my estate, heeding neither cold nor hunger, and scarcely knowing day from night.

"Oh, Bertha! all I had before endured was as nothing compared with the maddening thought of standing a convicted felon before her who loved me so well. Oh! it was fearful to bear, but I deserved it all.

"Even the endearing, fond caresses of Augustus and yourself soothed me not. He will go forth into the world ere long, was the thought that continually haunted me,—he will go forth into the world, and it cannot be but that he must meet some of those, who, if they had not known me personally, may have heard of the iniquity by which my name has been rendered infamous for ever, and I driven forth a miserable outcast, to wander amid poverty and wretchedness in distant lands.

"He will hear me spoken of as a swindler, a murderer, a wretch covered with crimes, and unfit to associate with even the worst of mankind.

"Oh! how cautiously did I guard every word that might lead either of you, when children, to question me about my youth and former friends.

"I extracted a promise from your mother never to mention the name I had formerly borne; she seemed struck with astonishment at the earnest—nay, almost fierce manner, in which I insisted upon her compliance, but as she never vexed me by asking questions when I was in those fearful moods, she readily gave the promise, and I believe never broke it."

"Never! My mother never even hinted at such a thing; once—and once only—in the course of my life have I had cause to suspect your present name was not the one you had always borne; but not until this morning did I know what it really was," said Bertha.

"And do you think such is the case with your brother?—have you cause to believe he knows me for other than I now appear?"

"Not the slightest,—he has no secrets from me. Had Augustus ever heard one word in reference to your early life more than you yourself might chance to have told him, *I* at least should know it."

"Heaven be praised! He is not likely to hear the dismal tale where he now is, and I humbly trust my sorrows and sufferings will all be ended ere he returns, for then it must be known."

"Why so, dear father,—why *must*?"

"Have patience, Bertha, with me,—have patience, my sweet child!—there is little more to tell, but when that little *is* told—when you hear the name of him who fell a sacrifice to the murderous hand of that man whom his victim had called *friend*, you will shrink from the wretch in horror and loathing."

"Nay, dear father, think not so meanly of me, I implore you; if you sinned deeply, deeply have you suffered; you are penitent, and who shall dare condemn those who turn with an humble and a contrite heart to the throne of our merciful and gracious Father! We dare not doubt but that prayers, repentance, and suffering such as yours, has been heard by Him who is more ready to listen than we to pray,—there is hope for the deepest sinner! Do not give way to this terrible despair,—you will feel more at peace now you have unburdened your

heart of its long pent-up load of sorrows. If the mention of that name you seem so much to dread will add to your distress, do not, I earnestly entreat, increase your present state of painful agitation by pronouncing it; and now you have told me all,—all I need know,—never, dearest father,—never, I beseech you, revert to the terrible subject again.”

“Bertha, I have *not* told you all you must know,” said Mr. Darcey, with fearful vehemence—“no, you *must* hear that name,—have you resolution?” cried he, grasping her arm, and glaring upon her with the wild fierceness of insanity—“are you prepared?”

“Father!” exclaimed the terrified girl, shaking off his iron clutch, and starting to her feet in bewildered horror,—“father! what mean you? There is some fearful mystery here!”

“That will soon be solved,” replied he, with a hollow, frightful laugh. “Aha, aha! she recoils from me even before she has heard it! Oh, Cutbert Greyling! Cutbert Greyling! amply, fully, art thou avenged!”

“Who, who?” shrieked Bertha. “Miserable man! and was it indeed my beloved Felix’s father thy murderous hand deprived of life! I cannot love thee now! Oh, Felix, Felix! and must we never, never meet again?—my heart will break,” sobbed the poor girl bursting into tears, and sinking on the floor in all the abandonment of utter, helpless woe. “Oh, Felix! must we part for ever? Never till this moment did I know how deeply, how devotedly I loved you. No; death would be a blessed boon, compared with the misery we must both endure by this cruel, cruel separation! Father of Mercy, take pity on me,” cried the weeping girl, dropping her

aching head into her lap. "Oh, Felix, Felix ! would that we had never met ! I cannot, *will* not part from thee for ever,—let me die, but do not tear me from him I love so well, so truly ! I cannot renounce him and *live*. I feel,—I feel I *cannot* ;" and again the fair girl sobbed as though her very heart was bursting.

"My child, my child !" cried the wretched man, hanging over her in pitiable despair,—*"look at me, Bertha,—have mercy on me,—spurn me not ! Oh, in Heaven's name, turn not from me with loathing ! She heeds me not,"* groaned he. *"This is the last stroke, and it will kill me."*

"Father, father," cried the girl, starting up, and throwing her arms around his neck, *"pardon, oh, pardon me this savage cruelty ; monster that I am to rack a heart already torn with misery, like thine ! Forget what I have said—I will be all you wish—but oh, 'tis a hard, hard trial,"* continued she, dashing the scalding tears from her throbbing eyes—*"a hard trial, yet it must—it shall be borne !"*

"I do not deserve this—'tis too, too much," and the strong man, who for years had buffeted with his own wretchedness, staggered, and fell back fainting, overcome by the noble generosity of a young and gentle girl. Oh, woman ! what canst thou not be brave enough to do, when the hour of trial meets thee !

"Listen to me, dear father," said Bertha, seating herself by his side, when he was sufficiently recovered to comprehend what she said—*"listen to me, dear father, I will do all, and everything you wish—but we must leave England—I cannot stay here."*

"Nay, nay, that may not be, I cannot——"

"Father, it may—it must—it *shall* be," replied Bertha, in a clear, decided voice. "No middle course is left; we must leave England, and that immediately—our stay beyond to-morrow at Darcey Hall, would be fatal."

"And your mother?"

"Shall know everything ere I sleep."

"Bertha, Bertha, for pity sake pause before you—"

"I will *not* pause, father; had you but told her your terrible tale years, years ago—ay, even before you married her—more than half this misery had been spared us."

"Then all, all, is lost!" groaned the woe-worn man; "she will hate, despise, and leave me!"

"Oh, father, father, how little do you know of woman's heart! Could she share your sorrows when she guessed not even the source from whence they came?" Had you but made a confidant of her, instead of treating her with suspicion and dread, how different might things now have been. Trust to her love, father; the woman who has once loved, still loves on—nay, I do believe the very crimes themselves, committed by him who has her heart, only serves to draw that heart closer towards the sinner, from the feeling that he who has erred, must suffer, and in proportion as he sorrows, so does he need sympathy and consolation. Fear not my sweet mother, she will now prove to you what she has long, long yearned to be, but dared not ask it—a friend, adviser, and consoler."

"No, no; that is more than even woman, with all her love, is capable of; think but how I have treated her, and then ask your heart what return I deserve? She will—she must, hate me; and when she knows me for the wretch I am, she will leave me in scorn, and I shall never again behold her!"

Tell her, Bertha—tell her all—spare me not; my cup of misery is full to overflowing, and I must drain it to its bitterest dregs.”

“We must tell her all; for in that, dear father, lies your only hope or chance of peace. Fear neither look nor word of reproach from her; she will soothe, but never upbraid you.”

“Bertha, Bertha, it cannot be; I have wronged her too deeply!”

“In keeping your sorrows from her, father, you have. The only reparation you can now make her, is to confide wholly, implicitly, entirely in her. Hold nothing back; tell her all—all you have told me, and trust to her affection for what shall follow.”

“Oh, Ellen, Ellen! how can I bring myself to own to thee, that he——”

“Father, you shall not—leave the task to me; the truth, sad as it is, will prove no worse than her own suspicions.”

“Does she guess——”

“No woman can love, as my mother loves you, and remain insensible to such sufferings as you have endured, for long, long years.

“Do you imagine, because she wore a tranquil look, and never *seemed* to see your wretchedness, for fear of making that wretchedness greater, she did not *know* some deep absorbing sorrow weighed heavy at your heart, turning your better nature to what it was?

“No, no, believe me, the grief she felt on your account fell little short of your own bitter woe. Oh, dear father! how vastly have you erred in acting thus towards my mother. What years of ceaseless doubts, and torturing fears, had been spared

you both, had you but told her all this fearful tale, even before she became your wife."

"And would she then have consented to share my misery? Oh, no, no! she must have rejected my selfish proposals with horror."

"She would *not*. You say you both had loved with your hearts' *first* affections; can you doubt that when she knew how much of consolation you stood in need of, she would have withheld that consolation from you? Oh! surely you understand not woman's love, or you could not judge her thus."

"Bertha, I have been wrong—very wrong—I see my error now! Go, sweet child, go—tell her all—act by me as you will—I do not deserve such blessings. Heaven shall reward you both for all your love," said he, sinking back exhausted by the mighty struggle he had gone through. "Go, dearest, the sooner she knows it *now*, the better."

"I go, father," said the noble girl firmly. "Have no fears; trust all to her love, and it shall not fail thee!"

"Brave Bertha! Thine was, indeed, *true* courage."

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## CHAPTER XX.

"DEAR MRS. MORTON,

"At last I know all;—the terrible tale you so dreaded I should hear is now told. It was by the hand of my mother's husband, that Felix Greyling's



father fell ! Dear, dear Mrs. Morton, feel for your unhappy Bertha. Oh, could you guess the pang of agony that shot through my poor heart, when he mentioned the name of Cutbert Greyling, you would pity me, indeed ; I cannot describe the horrid sensations that seized me ; I felt as if the earth was slipping from beneath my feet, and I stood on the brink of a fearful, black, deep, bottomless pit, into which I must fall headlong, never to rise again ; for the moment, I scarcely knew either what I said or did, so completely was I crushed by the terrible misery that stood out in such fearful reality before me.

“ Heaven be praised the shock lasted but for a few minutes ; the pitiable suffering of that miserable man, who has worked all this woe, roused me from my own selfish sorrows, to attempt the vain trial of soothing his. Oh, my dear Mrs. Morton, what a life of ceaseless wretchedness has his been ! Could any one who contemplated sin, but see him as I have seen him, and they would start back with shuddering horror at the frightful monster, for sin *is* a monster of hideous deformity, terrifying even its very votaries. The death of Sir Cutbert Greyling is not the only crime Henry Mountmorris has to answer for ; it was but the result of a monstrous piece of villany ! Oh ! that I should have to write such words of him I ever loved and venerated, with all the warm, deep affection, of a fond, fond child.

“ I was so very young when my own father died, that I can scarcely recollect the feelings I entertained for him ; but I am certain, had he lived, I could not have loved and respected him more than I did Mr. Darcey, for has he not ever been to us both as the kindest, dearest of parents ? Yes, yes,

that shall be alone remembered ; I will forget his crimes, and think but of his love, and sufferings. Oh, should Augustus ever hear the dismal tale, it would break his heart ! That intense affection and esteem he has for Mr. Darcey is something extraordinary ; I am certain he could never be brought to believe the man he so loves and venerates had ever been guilty of such awful crimes ! dear Augustus,—I trust it may be long, long ere he knows the frightful story.

“ And now, my dear friend, I have a favour to beg ; you must use every argument in your power to dissuade Sir Felix from following us. Oh, how bitterly will he accuse me of caprice—of want of affection—dear Felix !—should he think my love for him is lessened ! Oh ! how torturing is the thought, and yet I cannot explain. What can I tell him ? That the man his Bertha calls father, is him against whom a fearful oath is recorded ; he who took the life of his own beloved parent ; the man he has ever looked upon as his mortal foe ? I cannot, cannot do it ; they must not meet ! Oh, Felix ! if I never see thee more, this may not—*shall* not be.

“ Felix, dear Felix ! you will look upon me as the most fickle, false, of my sex. A heartless wretch, unworthy of thy rich love ; but I cannot help it. If my poor heart breaks in the struggle, it must be done.

“ Oh, my friend ! use what arguments you can ; tell him as much as you dare, but do not, I earnestly implore you, do not let him think me faithless. I had rather lay me down and die, than for one moment he should doubt my love.

“ I shall write to him, but I can explain nothing. Will the plea of Mr. Darcey’s illness sufficiently

account for this sudden flight from our own land ? No, no ; that will but seem like some poor, paltry excuse, for causes unexplained ; and then, then he must think me deceitful ! Oh ! the thought is terrible, most terrible—what shall I, what can I do ?

“ Perhaps we may never meet again ! He will deem me unworthy of his love, and—and—but no, I dare not dwell upon *that* ; my poor aching brain could not endure the contemplation of such hopeless misery. Plead for me, my dear friend ; tell him his Bertha is true and faithful, but that causes she may not—dare not explain, compel her to act as she has done.

“ I must trust all to you, dear, kind, generous friend : my own letter will rather increase than dispel his doubts—for what can I tell him ?

“ When I rose this morning, all joy and happiness—oh ! how little could I think that ere night my sun of hope and peace would be set, perhaps for ever.

“ Dear Felix, could you but know the weight of misery that hangs upon my poor heart, and seems as if it would never leave me more,—oh ! surely, surely, you could not wrong me by suspicions of my truth. No, no, I feel he cannot ; let him think of me as he will, no doubts of my love can ever cross him ; and yet—away, away with the fearful thought !—it shall not, it shall not gain entrance, or ’twill madden me.

“ Strange, most strange, my dear friend, that never till this day did it strike me to observe the terrible increasing gloom of Mr. Darcey, ever since I first told him I had given my love, and promised my hand to Sir Felix Greyling. How blind must I have been ! for now it all rushes back upon my memory in its frightful reality, I am amazed

how I could so long remain unsuspecting of something being wrong. Full well do I remember the agonized look he cast upon me, when I first mentioned that dear name; he appeared literally to recoil with horror; for many days we missed him, and then he returned pale, haggard, wild, and almost starved; but as he had frequently been in the habit of leaving home for days—nay, weeks together, without our having the most remote idea what had become of him; and he fiercely charged my poor mother, (when on one occasion she ventured to remonstrate with him upon the injury he was doing himself, by indulging in those miserable wanderings,) never, at the peril of incurring his extreme displeasure, again to dare to interfere with, or remark upon anything he ever did or said, we became so accustomed to the extraordinary violent waywardness of his temper, and the repeated attacks of his almost frenzied moods, that at last we began to look upon his misanthropical melancholy as hopeless, and by mutual consent we both avoided dwelling upon the distressing subject of his wanderings as much as possible; so that although, as I have observed, his manner was wild and inexplicable, it excited no new fears at the time, though I call to mind *now*, that, fearful as had been some of his former attacks, he never behaved so perfectly like a maniac before; and oh! my dear Mrs. Morton, is it to be wondered at?

“More than once he has called me into his study, and told me he had a terrible secret to communicate, but as upon such occasions my mind always reverted to what you said, I naturally concluded the tale he had to tell referred to none other than himself, and have sat in anxious expectation of what should follow; but the unhappy man could

never summon sufficient resolution to break the spell that bound him, and not until this morning, upon receiving Sir Felix Greyling's letter, announcing his intention of coming to Darcey Hall, has the hideous truth been revealed.

"Unhappy, wretched, miserable man! What must have been his sufferings for years, long years of torturing dread, and agonizing doubts? Indeed, indeed, he is to be pitied! and though my heart break in the struggle, I will never leave him; never, never! I have an awful duty to perform, and it shall be fulfilled.

"Oh, Felix! I may never see thee more; never hear thy dear voice; never be gladdened by thy sweet, sweet smile! Can I, can I bear this? Oh, Father of Mercy! strengthen my heart, and direct my thoughts aright; enable me to bear up against these heavy trials with fortitude and meekness, that in whatever way it seemeth good to thy infinite wisdom these sore afflictions shall end, I may have the consolation of an approving conscience.

"Farewell, dear, kind friend; we leave Darcey Hall to-morrow, and commence our sad journey, with sorrowing, heavy hearts. The choice of place was left to my mother, and she proposed Switzerland.

"Oh! under any other circumstances, and with any other feelings, how delighted should I be at the prospect of visiting that sweet land. But now, alas! all places will prove alike to me. With a heart clouded by hopeless woe, what matters it where we are? The sun may shine brightly, the heavens may smile in all their brilliant beauty, birds may sing, flowers waft their fragrance, all nature look gay and happy; but still the wretched sees it, feels it, heeds it not!

“Could I once have thought a few short hours would change me as I now am changed? *Am I* the same being I was yesterday? No, I cannot be! Do I look upon this fair scene with the eyes I did when this morning’s sun arose? No, no; I do not! One day’s sorrow has wrought greater alteration in me, than long years of ordinary existence could have done. I left my bed, a happy, joyous, gay, light-hearted, laughing girl; I shall return to it, a sorrow-stricken, miserable, broken-hearted woman.

“There is much more I would say to you, but I can scarcely see the paper on which I write; my tears blind me, my temples throb, and my head aches so intensely, that I feel quite dizzy with the pain.

“Do for me, dearest, as I would do for you, did you stand as much in need of a friend as your poor Bertha. Tell him all you may with safety, but do not, I implore you, do not let him follow us. Tell him that, amid all the mystery that surrounds her, his Bertha would die, rather than be false to one she loves so well.

“In your hands rests the only thought or hope of happiness left to guide me through years, perhaps, of suffering, gloom, and sorrow; to you I look as the only friend whose mediation can save me from utter, hopeless misery. Think not lightly of the sacred trust I have reposed in you. Remember that to you, and you alone on earth, can I now turn for consolation. Oh, in mercy, let me not trust in vain! Think of me, as one living without hope, or thought of happiness again in this world, and then ask your heart if I demand too much.

“Pardon me, dearest, kindest, best of friends, for thus ungratefully daring to doubt you; but I

feel as if this sudden wreck of all my pictured happiness had changed my temper, and made me almost morose and suspicious.

“Once more, farewell! may Heaven bless you! That you may for ever be spared even the shadow of such misery as wrings her wretched heart, is the earnest prayer of your ever affectionate,

“BERTHA ELLEN MURRAY.”

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## CHAPTER XXI.

DEAR reader, hast thou ever been to Switzerland? If thou hast, thou knowest it is a sweet land,—a land of beauty, innocence, and peace. If thou hast not, blame me not for loving that which thou wouldst love too, hadst thou but seen it!

Dear Switzerland! Oh, how beautiful are thy snow-capped mountains, and thy green, smiling vales! Ah, with what soothing, melancholy pleasure do I now dwell in memory on those peaceful, happy days spent amid thy bright and sunny dells!—days, alas! of calm, blest repose, fled,—never, never to return!

Mother of all that is good, noble, brave, generous, hospitable, true and kind,—fair Switzerland, I love thee!

On the summit of a beautiful green slope,—how green, how beautiful!—stood one of the prettiest, most fairy-like dwellings eye ever beheld. The fair, white walls peeped, here and there, through the gay, green trellis, on which clustered the large,

rich, luxuriant, dark-purple grape, whose massive branches, half hid by the thick, mantling foliage, shone brightly in a midday sun, looking far more like things of rarest art, than the scarcely heeded work of simple nature.

All around breathed peace and sweet tranquillity; the gorgeous tints of an early autumn noon-day sun threw its slanting rays, in mellowed beauty, athwart the glowing landscape; the trees, laden with their golden store of ripe and tempting fruits, scarce moved a leaf, so balmy calm was all the clear and lucid atmosphere; the gay parterres of choice and brilliant flowers shed forth their delicious fragrance around, from every side, upon this earthly little paradise; rare birds warbled sweet music from each branch, while echo caught up their joyful song, making the welkin ring with harmony and gladness.

Ah! that was a lovely scene,—lovely in its beautiful simplicity!

Yes, all things told of calm content, of blissful rest, of undisturbed repose, and it spoke not falsely.

Without reigned joy and beauty, within dwelt peace and loveliness. Yes, it was a soul-cheering sight, one that might have made the most despairing hope, the most hardened pray.

Oh, revelation! bright, glorious, blessed gift of an all-merciful God! what canst thou,—what hast thou not done for fallen, sinful man?

Thou canst raise the broken spirit and desponding heart from the lowest depths of misery and despair, causing light, and joy, and hope to spring, where doubt and horror dwelt.

It is not while surrounded by wealth and friends,



while enjoying the rich blessing of health and strength ; it is not while gladness is in the heart, laughter on the lip, that we can know or *feel* thy *real* value ; it is not while all things smile upon us, and work together for our worldly good, that we understand the worth of those inexhaustible treasures contained in thy sacred pages ; but when sorrow and suffering comes, when griping poverty, with all its stinging miseries, overtake us,—when those upon whom we have lavished our heart's first, best, truest affections, turn from us with coldness and aversion,—when false friends leave us to struggle with want and pain, and sickness and sorrow, lonely and alone, unsoothed, uncared for, scorned and cast aside,—when none heed our sorrows,—when our name is never mentioned, but with words of cold disdain, or slighting, withering contempt,—when the world has lost its charms, because we can no longer enjoy its pleasures,—then, *then* it is, we turn to a merciful, long-suffering, all-gracious God, for aid and consolation. And does he cast us off ? Does he turn a deaf ear to our earnest supplications ? Does he say, “ In thy prosperity thou thoughtest not of me ; in thy adversity I forget thee ” ?

No ; go sinner, go, even at the eleventh hour, go, and fall at the footstool of thy ever-merciful Father ; plead for pity, for pardon, and for grace ; with an humble, a contrite, a sincere heart, seek forgiveness through the merits of his blessed Son, in humility, in lowliness of spirit, in meekness, with true repentance, in perfect reliance on his power and will to save ; and thy prayers, thy supplications shall not be offered up in vain.

I have stood by the couch of the sick man ; I have beheld him with despair in his heart, gloom

and horror in his eye, wrestling fiercely with the torturing fiends that beset him, writhing beneath the terrors of an awakened, evil, upbraiding conscience, speaking as one without consolation or hope, loathing this life, and dreading the prospect of another. In a short while I have seen this man,—this very being,—who, so little time before, had been cast down in hopeless anguish, remorse, and dread despair, hating his fellow-mortals, and fearing to meet his God,—I have seen this man smiling in calm and trustful happiness, his heart lifted up in humble reliance and thankful gratitude, patiently awaiting the summons of that Great Being, who, a few months back, he hardly dared to think of. Yes,—the miserable, gloomy, heart-stricken, desponding sinner, had now become the cheerful, grateful, peaceful, humble penitent.

And what had worked this mighty change? What had raised the wretched, crime-stained man from the lowest depths of despair and horror to this blessed state of earnest, confiding hope, heart-felt thankfulness, and peaceful resignation? Religion,—pure, holy, beautiful religion.

Oh, ye who know not religion, who have never *felt* its sweet influence, ye guess not what *true* happiness is!

To hear its precepts, and practise its principles is good, but to *feel* its power, and *understand* its *value*, is better.

Kind, considerate reader,—pardon, oh! pardon, what must seem here misplaced.

To write of those high and holy things in such simple pages as these may appear to thee not only ill-timed, but wrong; and so, indeed, it would, did I only tell a tale of fiction,—a story to amuse. I speak but of that which I have seen, and known,

and witnessed; he of whom I write, lived in misery, died in happiness. I knew him in his sorrow, and I saw him in his joy.

He lived with religion in his *head*, and he was wretched; he died with it in his *heart*, and he was happy.

Peace be with thee! Many, many, long years have passed since thy weary pilgrimage on earth was ended, the grass waves over thy silent grave in a distant land, thy place is forgotten, thy name swept from the records of men,—thou art as thou hadst never been, but humbly is it hoped thou hast reached that blessed home where all is peace.

“Bertha,” said the feeble voice of Mr. Darcey, “I feel very, very weak this morning. I fear I am sinking fast,—where is your mother, love?”

“Gone to lie down, dear father,—let me raise your pillow a little; you have slept long and sweetly, and though you complain of weakness now, you will feel better by-and-by, I am certain. You have not rested so calmly for months,—I hardly dared to breathe, lest I should disturb your slumbers, or awaken you.”

“Sweet child! how much do I owe thee? May Heaven’s choicest blessings rest on thy dear head. Oh, Bertha! but for thee what should I now have been? How great, how vast is the debt I owe thee!”

“Nay, father, the debt is more than paid by witnessing this glorious, happy change,—so perfect and so full.”

“And who has wrought this mighty change, dear Bertha?”

“God and his Holy Word, dear father,” replied the young girl solemnly.

“Yes, Bertha, and through thy blessed agency.

Should I be what I now am but for thee and thy deep, unwearying, devoted, holy love?"

"Father, could you but guess how those trials and sorrows I have undergone were lightened and soothed by the blessed conviction that, through my humble endeavours as an instrument in the hand of that Great Being, (to whose eye the secrets of all hearts are bare, and who knows I speak the truth,) you have been brought to look to his mercy-seat for pardon and grace,—could you but understand the sweet tranquillity that dwells within my heart when I contemplate your present state of calm resignation, and full confiding hope with what it was,—while a still voice whispers, that, through my lowly means, God, in his great wisdom, saw good to bring about this mighty change,—dear father, could you know the joy that springs in my heart as I return Him thanks for all these mercies, oh, indeed, indeed! you would envy, rather than pity me."

"If I may judge of that peaceful happiness by my own dear child, great, great is thy bliss. Oh! how much have I to be grateful for?"

"How much have all His creatures to be grateful for, dear father?"

"They have, they have, my child!" said the sick man, fervently. "Oh! what, indeed, are all this world's goods in comparison with that one thing needful?—worse than dross,—more hollow than vanity!"

"Father of goodness! how great is thy power! how wonderful thy wisdom, and how deep, how full, how perfect should be our reliance on thy Almighty mercies!"

"And is it *not* perfect, dear father? is there one thought of doubt, one little feeling of mistrust yet

remaining?" said Bertha, earnestly. "Oh! if any such still lingers, let me implore you to cast it forth,—peace cannot dwell while doubt remains. As your repentance has been sincere, so should your trust be full and perfect."

"It is, my child,—I have not a shadow of doubt within my heart to cloud my peaceful end. Life is fast ebbing, Bertha,—I know I have but few hours to live, and this is among the many, many mercies He has vouchsafed me. He spared me for repentance, and now takes me from a world where my further stay could but bring sorrow and affliction to all I love so dear,—to those I owe so much. There is but one drop of bitterness in my cup, and could that be removed I should indeed die in perfect peace."

"Father," said Bertha, raising her tear-stained face, for despite her utmost efforts to preserve composure, his sad words, and a feeling of certainty that those words would shortly be fulfilled, smote on her heart with an icy chill, and forced heavy tears from her weary, watchful eyes. "Father, tell me what it is that yet lingers to distress you? and if it is within my power to save you this last pang, speak, and fear not that your Bertha will obey you."

"I should die in perfect peace, could I be assured of Sir Felix Greyling's full forgiveness."

"Can you doubt it?"

"I can scarcely hope for it."

"Father, dear father,—let, oh, let me ——"

"Cease, Bertha, cease,—I know what you would say, but it is too late now,—a few short hours and I shall have past away to another, and I humbly trust, a better world. When you are his wife, Bertha, tell him all,—I would not die with the smallest

particle of deceit resting on my conscience ; but still it seems to me better for you both that so it should be. When I am gone, you will find a packet among my papers, addressed to Sir Felix Greyling, —tell him my miserable story, and then give him that. Remember, Bertha, 'tis the dying request of one who loves you better than all earthly things,—think not lightly of my last petition. I would not ask thus much did I not deem it for your happiness so to do,—when you are his wife tell him all, but not before."

Bertha bowed her head in silence ; she would fain have implored permission to tell Sir Felix all, the first time they should meet ; the bare idea of keeping so dark a secret from him who should know her every thought, smote with a painful feeling on her pure and guileless heart ; but she saw it was now too late to dwell on the distressing subject, for though Mr. Darcey had quite overcome those dreadful attacks that used to agonize his frame whenever allusion was made to those terrible scenes of bygone misery, yet still enough of remorse remained to make the name of him he had so greatly wronged, a word of bitter self-reproach and condemnation.

"It shall be as you wish, dear father," said the fair girl, after a momentary silence ; "it shall be as you wish."

"Heaven bless thee, my sweet child !" said the dying man, laying his hand gently on her head ; "may all good gifts be thine, for truly dost thou deserve them."

"Ellen," continued he, addressing Mrs. Darcey, who at that moment entered the room, "Ellen, I would fain have thy forgiveness repeated yet once again,—tell me, dear wife, there is not one up-

braiding thought remaining to cloud thy mind against me,—tell me that even when recollection brings back those years of suffering, caused by my more than cruel treatment, thou canst say to thy heart, ‘I pardon him.’”

“Oh, Henry, Henry!” sobbed his gentle wife — dropping on her knees by the bedside, and taking his poor emaciated hands within her own, “oh Henry, Henry, why will you add to my sorrow by speaking so! Forgive you, dearest Henry! what have I to forgive? Ought I not rather to entreat *your* pardon, for not having acted by you as Bertha has done? Oh, had I but firmness, years ago, to have drawn your secret misery from you, what wretchedness would have been spared you! ‘Tis I, ‘tis I, who need forgiveness! It was my want of proper resolution, in not daring to brave repulse, that made you what you were. ‘Tis I must seek forgiveness of you, my Henry—not you of me. I possessed the power to save you much—much sorrow—and I used it not. Say you pardon me,” cried his weeping wife, hysterically, “or I shall for ever upbraid myself!”

“Ellen, dearest Ellen, this is more than I can bear. Your noble generosity wounds me deeper than would the bitterest reproaches,” said the sick man, covering his face with his hands, vainly endeavouring to hide the large tears that rolled through his fingers, and mingled with his wife’s. “Oh! what treasures did I cast from me, nor knew their value until it was too late. No, not too late—not too late,” exclaimed he, earnestly. “God is all merciful—He made me know their worth in time to save—blessed, blessed be they—I die happy. Cease weeping, dear wife, and join with me in returning a last thanksgiving to our Heavenly Father,

for all his unbounded mercies, vouchsafed to one so deeply, so wholly, so every way unworthy of his goodness. Bertha, dearest, read me the service for this day ; it is the last time, I feel full sure, I shall ever listen to thy sweet voice. Speak loudly, love, my senses are all becoming dull, and I would not lose one word from that blessed book, the *true* knowledge of whose inestimable treasures has made me what I am."

Bertha read the service as he desired her ; and then, opening the sacred volume at that most beautiful part of Isaiah, where man is bid to think of his God, not as an avenger, but as a kind and gracious parent, waiting, and ever ready to pardon those who turn to seek his forgiveness with a lowly, contrite, and sincere heart, she repeated, in a distinct, solemn voice, those blessed assurances of the Almighty Being, uttered by the mouth of his chosen servant.

While she read on, a sweet, an almost seraphic smile, rested upon the wan features of the dying, and when she ceased, he raised his clasped hands towards heaven, exclaiming fervently, "Father of Mercy, I thank thee. Blessed be thy name, for ever and ever !

"Oh," continued he, with an energy almost beyond his fast-failing strength—"Oh, who, in the full enjoyment of youth, health, and vigour, surrounded by all that is lovely and enticing, who can look upon this bright beautiful earth, and say they wish to die ? But who that looks upon it with the eyes of the dying, and sees it as it is—vain, hollow, empty—its pleasures but folly, its wealth and honours, fleeting vanity !—oh, who that views this world as *I* now do, would say, 'I wish to live ?' No, our sojourn here is surely but to prepare us for a



blessed eternity, and happy, thrice happy; indeed, are they who have been led to repentance ere death surprised them! Oh, gracious Father! had it been thy will to have summoned me hence a few short months back, how should I have dared to meet thy awful presence? But thou hast been merciful unto me—oh, how merciful! Ellen, dear wife, and thou, sweet child, to whom I owe the bliss I now enjoy, take my deep, heartfelt, grateful thanks, for all that you have done for me. None but Heaven itself can repay the mighty sacrifice thou hast made, dear child, in my behalf. Bless thee!—bless thee!—dearest, great shall be thy reward!”

“Oh, Henry,” sobbed his poor wife, “you must not—must not leave us! I cannot part from you now. God will grant you to our prayers yet a little longer. Oh, Henry! if you knew how I have loved you, you would not talk of dying, as if death could bring no pang of sorrow to those you leave behind.”

“Cease, dearest, your grief is all unavailing. The cold hand of death I feel is stealing on me now. Do not weep thus bitterly, my Ellen; it makes me sad to see you so distressed. Think of me as only parted from you for a short while, to meet again, in perfect joy and peace. When I am gone, bury me here, in this sweet, calm spot, where all of happiness I have ever known has shone upon me. Raise no monumental marble over my lowly grave. The name and deeds of those who have benefited their fellow-men may well be sculptured on their tombs, telling what they have been; but for *me*, whose life has passed in acts of crime, and years of misery—oh, it would be fearful mockery to speak of me as one deserving recollection or regret.

“Once more, I pray that Heaven may bless you

both. Life I feel is now fast ebbing. My limbs grow cold—a thick film seems gathering on my eyes—and—death—bless you—bless you both!”

He sank back on his pillow—they raised him up—but he was dead.

He who had sinned so greatly, sorrowed so deeply, and repented so truly, lay stretched before them a stiffening corpse. All that remained of the once gay, handsome, courted, Henry Mountmorris, was now but a senseless mass of clay! He died happy. Why should he be regretted?

They buried him in that sweet land—in the spot he loved so well. No gorgeous tablet marks his place of rest. A plain white marble slab points out where his coffin lies. Spring's earliest flowers bloom around his lowly grave—morning's first bright rays beam on his simple tomb—and sweet birds carol in the trees above. Peace rests with him. They mourned him as he should be mourned—in sadness, not despair.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

It was rather more than two years after the date of those events, recorded in our last chapter, that Mrs. Darcey, Bertha Murray, and Sir Felix Greyling, sat together in Bertha's own beautiful little sitting-room at Darcey Hall.

Oh, how different were the sensations of that innocent, pure-minded, self-devoted girl, at this

happy moment, from the soul-wrung, hopeless, desolating despair, that tore her young heart when she last entered this fairy-like place, on the morning she had left her sweet childhood's home to become a sad sojourner in a distant land, torn from him whose love was the bright star of her existence—the treasured blessing of her young devoted heart.

Oh, woman ! noble, generous, tender, self-sacrificing, much-enduring woman ! of what art thou not capable, when called upon to exert thy strength in the cause of sickness, sorrow, and affliction !

In health, strength, and prosperity, man may truly boast of his immeasurable superiority. When all things smile upon him, and work together for his good, then man, proud man, may look around him, and, in the boastfulness of his uplifted heart, exclaim, “ Verily, *man* is lord of the creation ! ” But wait for the hour in which adversity shall overtake him ; behold the day when his wealth, like a shadow, shall have vanished from his grasp ; when those who flattered his follies, and encouraged his pride, turn from him with a cold sneer upon the lip—a bitter word upon the tongue ; see him laid low on a bed of sickness, writhing in agony of mind and body, calling in piteous accents for a cup of cold water to slack his parching thirst, imploring aid from her who, perhaps, a few short weeks before, he looked upon as one far, far inferior to his own sovereign self. But without her, *now*, what would this *lord* of the creation be ? Worse than a weakly, puling infant.

Oh, man ! presumptuous man, in thy prosperity be but a little humble, and in thy adversity thou shalt never want a friend !

Amid the gay and glittering throng, leading the

light and graceful dance, warbling to sweet music her own fairy fingers makes, joining in the witty, brilliant conversation, enchanting all hearers by her *piquant* replies and dazzling repartees, casting mirth, and joy, and gladness around her, shining like some bright meteor to cheer our earth, adding beauty, by her own loveliness, to pomp and splendour! Yes, woman, there—where all is shining in sumptuous magnificence—there dost thou *seem* in thy sphere, a thing of life, and love, and glory! To the beholder, thou appearest fitted for such scenes, and such scenes for thee!

But how wrong—oh, how unjust—to judge of woman by what she but *appears*!

It is *not* in the glittering ball-room, amid the wealthy crowd, that woman *truly shines*!

See her, who yesternight stood radiant in beauty, smiles, and jewels, joy sparkling in her eye, gay words upon her lips, the bright star of the evening—courted, flattered, praised, admired—looking as though pain and want, suffering and despair, were things she had *heard* of, but knew not what they meant.

See her now, divested of her gorgeous attire, no jewels blazing in her hair, no ornaments of rich and costly price aiding that beauty they could not eclipse—all, all cast aside. Behold her dressed in a plain and simple robe, her beauteous tresses banded from her fair brow, the light laugh hushed, the bright smile fled,—behold her moving, with a cautious, noiseless step, about the sick man's darkened chamber, performing every humble duty of a kind, attentive nurse, watching through long, dreary nights, unwearied and uncomplaining, pouring the balm of peace on the bruised heart of her helpless patient, leading his thoughts from this world and this

world's empty follies, to that place of pardon, hope, and joy, where sorrow shall be no more remembered, where all is happiness and blest repose, where, indeed, the wicked cease from troubling, and the good shall be at rest.

Oh, woman, strong art thou in thy weakness—great is thy power, though thou knowest it not!

Amid scenes of mirth and festivity thou art beautiful! Amid scenes of misery and desolation thou art lovely! 'Tis there thou dost *truly* shine! There is thy sphere—there, where the proud man's heart is wrung with despair, his body tortured with pain and sickness—there, when all his own false friends have left him, in poverty, in woe, perhaps stained with crime, to die, and be forgotten by those his wealth had pampered—then, when all fall from him, he turns imploringly to thee for aid—nor shall he ask in vain.

In the day of prosperity, woman is as a silly butterfly—in the day of adversity, as a ministering angel.

And so was it with the sweet and gentle Bertha. Who that saw this graceful girl, surrounded by wealth, and almost courtly splendour, the admired of all eyes, the worshipped of all hearts, moving like a thing of light, and love, and beauty, amid gay, brilliant assemblies, the attraction of all present—looking like a creature formed to be ministered unto, as though the winds of heaven were too rough for her fair form to bear unshrinking—a gentle, fragile being, whose youthful innocence seemed to plead for lordly man's protection—a creature of softest sensibility, timid, and confiding.

Such was Bertha Murray when all things smiled. Reverse the picture, and behold her.

In the depths of his misery and terrible despair,

that proud man, who, for long years had hugged his own wretchedness, nor dreamed that simple woman, in her meek humility had strength, or power, to aid him in his afflictions, or share with him his woes, turns (compelled by the force of events) to this young girl for advice and consolation in his extreme hour of need, and nobly, bravely, does she give it.

Oh, Bertha Murray, how great, how terrible was the sacrifice to thy devoted heart; and yet, without one thought of doubt or hesitation, generous, high-souled, *valiant* girl! thou didst make it!

With woman it is but to see, and know what her *duty* is, and unflinchingly will she perform it—ay, though her heart break in the struggle, and the world should become a dreary desert, by the loss of him, who to her, was more than life, or aught else this earth could give.

How knew Bertha Murray, but that him she loved, roused to resentment by her sudden desertion of him, and stung by her seeming deceit and want of candour, might have cast her from his heart, and given those affections to another, he deemed her careless, or unworthy of?

How could she tell, but, perhaps, long ere her duties should be ended, and she herself free to return to her home, he whom she had left, with scarcely a word of explanation, to account for her seemingly strange and wayward conduct, might have gradually suffered her image to fade from his recollection, and replaced it by another, more worthy, and more beloved.

This might have been. She might have found him the husband of another. The bare thought stunned her. The reality she knew full well would prove her death; and yet, with that *true courage*,

of which woman, *woman* alone, is capable, she braved it all.

A whispering conscience told her, that, as an humble instrument in the hands of Providence, she might prove the means of saving a sinner from destruction. She listened to its voice, and obeyed the call.

Had Sir Felix Greyling loved, alas, like too many of his sex! Bertha Murray's chance of happiness had proved indeed but small. His pride would have been wounded, his self-love mocked; and though the affection felt for such a being as Bertha Murray could not be lightly cast aside, yet man, who is capable of all that is great and noble, saving the mightiest of our moral virtues, *self-sacrifice*, could scarcely have humbled his pride, and schooled his heart, to wait for *time*, and trust to woman's love, ere he condemned unheard. Most men (and we dare not blame them, for mysterious, indeed, appeared her conduct) would have cast her from them, as a light and worthless thing, or, at least, one in whom no faith could be placed. But not so did Sir Felix Greyling. He loved as men too rarely love—he *truly* loved, because he *trusted*. No affection, however intense, can be lasting, where *confidence* is not.

Faith is the groundwork of love; and when faith is wanting, love cannot exist. As the light of our glorious sun to man's eyes, so is the light of faith to his heart. Without light he shall pine and wither—without faith, love fades and dies.

Felix Greyling thought, paused, sorrowed, but never—no not for one moment—*doubted*. He knew her to be pure and honourable; and, though sorely perplexed—ay, even beyond endurance—at times,

to account for all the mystery that surrounded her, his *trust* was never shaken.

Even when he pressed her to tell him the cause that had so suddenly snatched her from his love, and she hesitatingly answered, "There was a fearful secret, a tale some day to tell, but that the tale might not be told as yet"—ay, even when he knew that her whose heart should be laid bare before him, nursed a secret she dared not disclose, he never doubted.

Noble, generous Greyling! well didst thou deserve a better fate!

Oh, that others had been like thee! How many a wrung and broken heart had been spared!

Ye who love, or *think* you love, first cast out every shadow of doubt; turn from *suspicion*, as from a loathed thing, and peace shall then dwell with you.

"My own, my beloved, my betrothed," said Felix Greyling, drawing the fair creature that sat beside him closer, still closer, to his bosom, and gazing fondly in her love-beaming eyes, "are we not happy, dearest? Could I have hoped to see thee thus unchanged?"

"Nay, say rather, Felix, could I have hoped to see *thee* thus unchanged? Thy love was sorely tried, dear Felix!"

"It was *never* tried, sweet Bertha; my heart was wrung with anguish at thy loss, but not for an instant did I ever *doubt* thee."

"Felix," said the gentle girl, while large tears of love and grateful happiness dimmed her lovely eyes—"Felix, dear Felix, I cannot tell thee of the deep gratitude that swells my heart, when I think of thy unbounded confidence in me, even now,



while I tell thee there is a secret thou shouldst know, but which I may not yet divulge——”

“No, nor ever shall, my Bertha, if the utterance of it will give thee pain, I——”

“Dear Felix, it is the bitter feeling that I am acting deceitfully towards you, which at times draws back from the otherwise perfect happiness I now enjoy. Would to Heaven I had not the last injunctions of a dying man to the contrary, then would I tell you all!”

“Bertha,” said Mrs. Darcey, aroused from her quiet study by the unusual tremor of her daughter’s voice, which rarely sounded so, unless when painful thoughts were passing in the speaker’s mind, and fearing lest the recollection of past trials might cloud their present calm, tranquil happiness, she laid aside her book, and adroitly turned the conversation to her son’s expected return——“Bertha, my love,” said she, “do you remember the date of your brother’s last letter?”

“Exactly a month ago to-day, mamma.”

“And I think he said in about five weeks from that time, he should be here.”

“Yes, mamma, indeed he did—dear Augustus! Shall I fetch his letter, mamma.”

“No, love, no; only I was not quite certain that I remembered the date correctly.”

“How earnestly I long to see your noble son,” said Sir Felix, turning to Mrs. Darcey. “I feel we shall be firm friends the moment we meet.”

“He is worthy of every praise that can be bestowed upon him,” replied the fond mother. “Augustus is, indeed, all that a doting parent could wish; my own—my noble boy!” cried the proud mother, while her voice swelled with delighted emotion at the thoughts of so soon beholding him

in whom her heart was wrapped. "How can I be sufficiently grateful to Heaven, for thus once more permitting thee to return in safety, to bless us with thy love!"

"He must, indeed, be all that is generous and brave, if the voice of fame speaks truly," observed Sir Felix. "His name is most honourably mentioned in the last dispatches; Augustus Murray is every way an ornament to his profession," continued he, enthusiastically; "brave, honoured, beloved!—and well he deserves his country's thanks."

"Dear Sir Felix, how sweetly soothing do those praises of my darling son sound to his mother's ears, uttered by one so truly noble and honourable as yourself."

"I speak of him but as others do, my dear Mrs. Darcey; the fame of his courage at the time, and his moderation after that glorious victory, is the theme of universal admiration; to make use of a rather inelegant phrase, he will be quite a 'lion' when he comes to London; all will be eager to court his acquaintance, and do him honour."

"Dear, dear Augustus! how proud I feel of him!" said his fair sister. "I shall never know how to make enough of him, he will be quite, quite spoilt among us, mamma—he will, indeed."

"Never, my love, never. Nothing could spoil such a heart as Augustus is blessed with; his last letter is written in all the light-hearted freshness of a happy schoolboy, rather than that of a—a——"

"Hero, mamma! Augustus is a perfect *hero*, if he has but done half what the newspapers say he has—and I *know* he has."

"Doubt it not, my Bertha, your brother has achieved that which may well place him among England's bravest defenders. Noble Murray! if

envy could be felt for one so truly generous, I might almost envy thee."

"Nay, Felix, *you* need envy none," said his beautiful betrothed, looking proudly at her prince-like lover—"not even Augustus Murray."

"Dearest Bertha, *thy* love is too sure a safeguard to admit of such a feeling; he who can boast of thy dear heart, could wish for nothing more."

The lovers looked into each other's eyes, and which one doubted? — neither — for truth was there.

"He must be about arrived at Portsmouth now, I should think," observed Mrs. Darcey.

"Then, mamma, we shall have a letter the day after to-morrow."

"We shall, Bertha, or before, perhaps."

"And I cannot stay to hear the joyful news."

"No? why not, Sir Felix?" asked Mrs. Darcey.

"Because I have business that calls me to town the first thing to-morrow morning—business that I *must* attend to."

"Can it not be deferred?"

"No, no, my dear Mrs. Darcey, it *shall* not be deferred," replied Sir Felix, smiling one of his happiest smiles; "I have Bertha's promise that it may not!"

"Mine, Felix! mine!" exclaimed the half-conscious girl, blushing, "I am sure——"

"And so am I, dearest; go I must and will, to-morrow. Remember, too, I shall see our hero before you do; so if you have any sweet tokens to send, make me the happy bearer."

"He will, mamma; Felix will see Augustus sooner than we shall, for you know he is always

obliged to go to London after he returns from a voyage, before he comes home."

"Then you shan't go," said Mrs. Darcey, playfully. "I cannot let you receive his first dear greeting—the thought makes me feel quite jealous."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Sir Felix, "it is too late to think of that now; I shall see him full three days before you do."

"Well at all events you can give a good account, dear Felix; and be sure you don't keep him too long in London, for the sake of shewing him. 'Lions' are noble animals, you know," said Mrs. Darcey, archly.

"Push me out at the door, my dear Mrs. Darcey; go I must, yet how to get away I don't exactly know. I ought to have been in town the day before yesterday, yet here I linger, and shall, I suppose, unless you will be considerate enough to lay your commands upon me to depart instantly; then, of course, I dare not disobey."

"Well, upon second thoughts," said Mrs. Darcey, "I find it would be better that you should go, because then you'll sooner be able to come back; so I say, 'Depart, Sir Felix Greyling.'"

"And I obey. Remember, dearest," whispered he, "one week after your brother's arrival at Darcey Hall—one week—and then I shall call you my own—my own beloved, precious bride—farewell, my Bertha!" And straining her to his breast, while pressing an ardent, fervent kiss on her sweet lips, he whispered again, "Remember, one week!" and then imprinting an affectionate kiss on the pale brow of his future mother, he tore himself from her he loved so truly and so well.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

"It is from Augustus—from dear, dear Augustus, mamma!" exclaimed Bertha, as her eye caught the superscription of a letter the servant was handing to Mrs. Darcey. "Oh, let me open it, mamma—pray do," continued the delighted girl, catching it up, and kissing it with almost child-like glee. "Yes, it is from Augustus, and dated Portsmouth. Oh, we shall all be so happy now he is come back!"

"Well, my love," said Mrs. Darcey, smiling a gayer smile than for years had enlivened her pale, sad features,—“well my love, you and I must be very silent in future about presentiments, and such like silly things. Here is our dear Augustus come back safe and well, despite our foolish forebodings, I am——”

"Mercy, mamma, how you *do* talk," said Bertha, playfully placing her pretty hand over her mother's mouth. "I declare you are as good as a witch; why that is exactly what Augustus says; see, I have got to the bottom of his letter, while you would have been gazing at the outside. Now do not say another word," continued she, seating herself on the side of her mother's chair, and throwing her arm affectionately round Mrs. Darcey's neck—"not one word, till I have read his merry letter quite through."

"DEAREST MOTHER,—

"Here am I, safe and well, in defiance of all your dismal prognostics. By the way, that puts me in mind to warn you about two things—the first, never again, at peril of violating truth, to call me

uncomplying, or unmindful of your strict injunctions. Did you not lay severe commands upon me to bring nothing back but a brown face and a merry heart? and *certainly*, I have obeyed you to the letter; for a visage more completely bronzed, none need wish to see; and for my heart, 'tis lighter than the gossamer floating in a summer's morn. But who can put foot on dear old English ground, after four years' absence, and not feel joyous? *None*, I should think.

"Now for the next. Be prepared, most fair and gentle ladies—inhabitants of Darcey Hall, to give me your faithful promise, never more to indulge in those elegant sources of woman's griefs and man's worry, yclept *presentiments*. Did you not both—ay, both—for you were not content to sing alone, but must needs croak forth in concert, like a pair of ravens, as you were, some dismal notes about never meeting more. I'll be sworn you could both beat me if you dared, for proving you two false and faithless prophets; so to avoid all chance of being turned, like the petitioning beggar from your door, I shall find out Greyling, (as I must go to London before I come to the Hall,) and place him in the post of danger—a kind of advance guard, to receive all cuffs, that might otherwise perchance be bestowed upon my luckless shoulders.

"Dearest mother, how I *do* long to behold your dear, kind face once again! And our fair Bertha,—though I'm not altogether so certain but that I should be somewhat wroth with the young puss. Was it well or maiden-like to go and promise herself to a fellow whom *I*, her brother, sage and wise, had not only never seen, but hardly ever heard of? How can she know I may approve her choice, or be pleased to call him brother? Well, 'tis no use

grumbling now, that's pretty clear, for, as the nursery rhyme hath it, 'the least said is soonest amended-ded.' Oh, by the way how is my new love, fair Esther Banks?—*new*, for if you remember, Bertha, I only owned to the soft impeachment a day or two before I came away,—not married yet, I trust, or promised either, as I intend trying my luck; indeed, I have serious thoughts of wooing, and, if adverse fate prevents it not, winning that same fair damsel for my own dear self.

"I cannot say there is much of sense or elegance to boast in this most splendid and connected epistle, but we are all noise, bustle, confusion, and merriment here. The idea of sitting down to write rationally, or reasonably, is a matter quite out of the question, so, dear mother, having but a few minutes in store ere the next post goes out, I'll cut this rigmarole short, and simply tell you, I go to town on Thursday, where business will detain me two days, I then hunt out Greyling, and down we both come, bag and baggage, as fast as four good horses will consent to bring us; so you may look for your *two* sons (hey, Bertha) about four o'clock on this day week.

"And now, farewell, my own dear mother, and in the joyful anticipation of soon seeing you, believe me to be, your ever affectionate son,

"AUGUSTUS ROMER MURRAY.

"*P. S.*—As I must of necessity go and see my little sweetheart, Hetty, I'm not so sure but she shall make a *third*. God bless you both!—A. M."

"There, mamma, what do you think of that? dear, kind-hearted Augustus," said the grateful, happy girl, as her beautiful eyes filled with tears of joy—"dear, kind Augustus, he is always think-

ing more about others than himself; we shall *really* have him here in a week. Oh, mamma! just imagine! wont it be delightful? I feel so gay and joyous, I hardly know what to do with myself. Oh, mamma! do smile again as you did just now—how happy it will make Augustus to see you look so cheerful. Oh, how grateful we ought to be! ought we not, dearest mother?" cried the sweet girl, again fondly kissing her mother's cheek.

"Indeed, dearest, we ought!" replied Mrs. Darcy, returning the caresses of her beautiful child; "we have both had our trials, and now I humbly hope they are over."

"They are, they are!—it would be almost wicked to doubt it; what can happen now, dear mamma?—surely, none but bright and peaceful days are in store for us. Augustus is returned safe and well, your health is far better than it has been for years; look at me—am I not well, and almost *too* happy, and, and——"

"Sir Felix Greyling is coming to claim the long promised hand of her he loves," said the gentle mother, gazing fondly on her lovely child—"yes, dear Bertha, all seems to be working together for good. Heaven grant no clouds may intervene to mar our present prospects!"

"What can, dear mother?"

"Nothing, my child, I sincerely trust. Did you not tell me, dearest, you had promised the marriage should take place immediately on your brother's return?"

"Yes, if you wish it."

"Bertha, dearest, you know how earnestly I have always wished to see you the wife of Sir Felix Greyling—to none could I give you with such heartfelt satisfaction. He is good, noble, wise, generous,



—all a fond mother would wish the man to be into whose care she consigned the happiness of a beloved daughter. Answer me truly, love, did you not pass your word?"

"I did, mamma."

"And will keep it?"

"Yes," replied the blushing girl.

"Thank Heaven, my earnest hope will be fulfilled before I die. But see, dearest, here comes Doctor Latimer in time to hear our news, throw back that window, it will save him the trouble of going round the lawn."

"Good tidings, dear doctor!" exclaimed Bertha, as the kind old man entered—"a letter from dear Augustus,—look here."

"Indeed, that is good news,—where is he now?"

"At Portsmouth, and will be home this day week."

"May I read it?" asked the doctor, drawing out his spectacles.

"*May* you read it! fie, Doctor Latimer, you are cross this morning, and I am half inclined to punish you by refusing the usual kiss when you go away."

"That would be punishment, indeed, fair child!" said the good old man; "but I know you will not be so cruel as to put your threat in execution, nor repay me thus severely for this my slight offence; perhaps you will read it to me, love."

"Certainly, if you promise to be *silent* while I read."

"Is that so very difficult?"

"I do not know,—well now, be all attention,"—saying which she seated herself on an ottoman at the doctor's feet, and read her brother's letter once again.

"Well, my dear friend, I most sincerely congratulate you," said Doctor Latimer, addressing Mrs. Darcey, when Bertha had done speaking; "you bore your trials with fortitude and resignation; may health and strength be granted you to enjoy those blessings Heaven in its goodness is now bestowing on you!"

"Thank you, dear doctor; you were ever ready with kindness and counsel to aid us in our time of sorrow, we may still want that same kind advice to help us in our day of joy."

"Well, dear Mrs. Darcey, wait me when you will, who so proud as I to do my best endeavour," replied the doctor, gaily; "I suppose you know Miss Bertha, here, promised long, long ago, I should give her away upon the happy occasion."

"Nonsense, Doctor Latimer, what made you think of that just now?"

"Why, really, I can't exactly say, thoughts will come unbidden sometimes; 'tis possible this *letter* might have a trifle to do with the matter. Yes, it is your brother's fault, not mine,—some strange association of ideas conveyed by *that*,—do you not think so, Mrs. Darcey?"

"Perhaps so," replied the happy mother.

"Well, well,—you may laugh at me as you will, doctor, I am not in a humour to quarrel with any one just now," said Bertha, blushing and smiling, at the same time stooping down to gather up the scattered leaves of a rose she had been most assiduously tearing to pieces, during the last three minutes; "you may laugh *with* me or *at* me, whichever suits you best—I shall be pleased either way, depend upon it, dear doctor. I am sure nothing could make me angry *now*, so it is no use trying, —none whatever, none."

"Surely, I have grown ten years younger within this last quarter of an hour," said the good man, rubbing his hands, and endeavouring to appear calm, though it was clear to see he had no small difficulty in preserving a becoming demeanour. "I have not felt so light-hearted for many a long day. 'Tis good to mourn with those that mourn ; but how greatly better far rejoicing with those that rejoice ! I'm rather glad you have no music in the room, else I might be tempted to play the fool, and get up and dance."

"Keep your dancing steps until the wedding," said Mrs. Darcey, archly.

"Mamma, now really that is too bad. What, *you* against me ?"

"Not *against* you ; *for* you, sweet Bertha ; but come, we will not be too hard upon you ; I have a tale for thy especial ear, fair maiden. News for thy news."

"What, more good news, dear doctor ? Pray tell it."

"I cannot say it is altogether *good*, neither may the thing prove *bad*, which way is not so certain ; but this *is* certain,—'tis vastly, wondrous droll."

"Why will you be so tantalizing ? Do let us hear it."

"What think you of the marriage of your old adorer, Botherem, the poet ?"

"Nonsense ! Botherem Banks turned Benedict ? Surely, doctor, you must be joking."

"I'm not, indeed ; I have his sister's word, and I'm sure while telling me, she seemed to view it as no joking matter."

"To his Selina, I suppose."

"Oh, no ! She cast him off, or he her, long ago. Doubtless, they were mutually tired of each other."

No, Esther tells me it is a most extraordinary match."

"Then, who is the fair bride?"

"Her name was Slater; she is older, much older, than the poet, so Esther says."

"That may be, and yet she need not count a many score of years."

"Why, no; not *many* score of years, though if she be, as his sister tells, almost double his age, there's little to be said in praises of her youth, for Botherem must certainly be *thirty*."

"What! dear doctor."

"Thirty, at the least."

"*Thirty*! why, surely, years must have multiplied upon the poet, faster than on other men; I should not certainly have supposed him to be more than eighteen when last I saw him."

"Why, judging from the shortness of his trowsers, or the length of his legs, (and they had not much of longitude to boast,) one might well imagine he had not yet done growing."

"Of a truth, dear doctor, he might grow on for many a day to come, and then be none too tall," said Mrs. Darcey, smiling.

"Dear friend, how glad I am to see you once again so cheerful; it does my poor old heart good to hear you pass a joke."

"I am sure there is no *joke* in what I just have said."

"No, indeed, mamma," laughed Bertha; "but what would then become of all those fair nan-keens?"

"They must be lengthened, Bertha; I see no other help, should such a sad calamity befall him."

"Really, doctor, I know not which is merriest, this morning—dear mamma or you."

"Or thyself, fair child."

"True, doctor; we are all merry, and happy too; may we long continue so," said Mrs. Darcey.

"Amen! from my inmost heart I say Amen to that."

"Come, doctor, I cannot afford to let you look grave—no, not even for a moment. Besides, I am curious to hear something more about the bard; tell me all you know—pray do."

"Well, then, to go back to his wife, I must not say she is *twice* his age; because such is not truth; but this maiden fair had lived up to the sober years of four times ten in single blessedness, and then 'she got a mon.'"

"*Forty*, do you say? Why, that's very absurd. Just think, mamma, how would Hetty Bridgenorth reconcile such a proceeding with her established creed? She declares the moment a woman reaches that staid, sober age—nay, long before,—if I remember right, soon after she has passed from five-and-thirty, she sets aside all thoughts of matrimony, knits stockings, nurses her sister's children, and brews her brother's tea."

"Well, we know there is no rule, but finds out its exceptions. Miss Bridgenorth here is certainly at fault; and, after all, the match may not turn out so bad. His lady wife has money, and should she but possess a little tact, they may manage to get on vastly well; at all events, 'twill cure him of his most besetting sin,—love-making."

"Poor Botherem! I sincerely trust he may be happy; for with all his gross absurdities, he is thoroughly kind-hearted and good-natured. I hope she will use him well."

"I hope so, too, love; but I have my doubts;

he is far too ridiculous for any woman to respect, and when that is wanting, affection soon departs."

"Indeed, I think you are quite right ; I do not believe the woman exists who could look at such a creature as Botherem Banks, and feel aught like respect for him. I must say, of all the ludicrous objects my eye ever fell upon, and I have seen many strange ones, I candidly confess I never beheld his equal. How Bertha ever could endure his hateful folly, with the fortitude and temper she did, seems to me perfectly inexplicable."

"I *endured* it, as you say, dear doctor, and that was all."

"Ha, ha !" laughed the doctor, "you must have been severely tried at times, fair Bertha ; but, bless me ! how I do gossip. I came to say farewell, for a day or two, as I am called away to see an old friend, some few miles off, who fancies *I* can do him good, and *I* alone."

"But you will not stay long, I hope," said Mrs. Darcey.

"No, no ; I'll be back in time for the wed—— Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Murray ! I trust I've not offended quite past forgiveness !"

"Do not despair, doctor ; if Bertha proves inexorable, I'll take upon myself to absolve you in the name of other parties. See, she is not *very* wroth."

"When people *try* to get up a frown, the case is seldom hopeless ; we may look to see a smile ere the sun goes down."

"When may we expect you again ?" inquired Bertha.

"Oh, I promise to be back before your handsome brother and his noble friend (for friends they will

be ere ten miles of their journey shall have passed) present themselves at Darcey Hall. So now, adieu!" When, shaking Mrs. Darcey warmly by the hand, and imprinting a kiss upon the lovely brow of his "fair child," as he always called Bertha, the kind old man, smiling, trotted off.

How to meet again!

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

"Now, *can* anything be more provoking?" said dear, kind-hearted, fussy little Miss Bridgenorth, as she stood leaning against the doorway of Mrs. Cleveland Morton's splendid drawing-room—" *can* anything be more provoking and vexatious? Here have I been standing a full half-hour, wait, wait, craning out my poor head, until I feel absolutely dizzy, that I might catch the very first glimpse of everybody as they come up stairs, to make sure he does not slip by, and yet he *wont* come! Well! 'tis no matter; I'm determined I'll not move, if it is for three hours, until he *does* come; no one shall introduce you to each other but myself, that's poz; it's what I have set my heart upon, and I'll not be balked of my humour,—no, not to please man, woman, nor child!"

"Neither would I, my dear Miss Bridgenorth; I admire your spirit," said her auditor, laughing; "but pray who may this *new* favourite be? I shall pick a quarrel with him, depend upon it, for I am fully resolved to dislike him, out of pure jealousy and contradiction, even before I have heard

his name. Two kings of Brentford on one throne is not at all to my taste ; besides, have you not told me, often and often, over and over again, I was your first, your last, your only favourite among *markind* ? and now you fain would hurl me from my high estate to place another there."

"No, no ; I don't want to hurl you from your high estate altogether ; but you must be content to stand aside for this one evening at the least, and——"

"Indeed, I am content to do no such thing, nay, what's more, I will not move the length of my foot for this new pet of yours, plead as you may."

"Oh, yes you will though, Sir Felix Greyling, when you know who he is ! but that's a secret. I name no names until the fitting time ; suffice it for you to be told, he is one of the handsomest, nay, the *very* handsomest fellow in London, at this present moment, and my most especial favourite."

"Well ! if that is not adding insult to injury, despair to grief, torture to pain, I know not what is. Oh, woman ! false as cruel ! have you not vowed to me, a hundred times, you thought me exceedingly well favoured,—handsome enough for all ordinary purposes ? and now——"

"Ay, ay ; so I have—for all *ordinary* purposes ; but this is an *extraordinary* purpose, I'd have you to know ! Has not this gay party been given solely to please me ? Am I less than mistress of the feast ? and shall presumptuous mortal like to thee dare dispute my sovereign will ?"

"Most undoubtedly not."

"Ah, well ! There now, that's behaving as you should. I told Mrs. Morton, (she really is one of the sweetest tempered, most obliging creatures in existence)—well, I told her I wanted a party,—



something on a grand scale, quite an affair. I could not give such a one as I thought worthy the occasion in my own house, because, you know, my rooms are very small, none half large enough to shew people off advantageously; I hate little rooms, that I do; nobody ever looks well in a small room; so I promised, if she would give the party, I'd bring some one who should grace it, and of whom she'd feel quite proud.

"A lion; a downright, positive lion!"

"Thank you; I'm rather grateful for this timely warning; for having no very particular wish to meet naughty Harry's fate, the sooner I depart, the better will it prove with regard to my own personal safety."

"There now! none of your nonsense. You understand me well enough. Why, I would no more suffer you to leave the house at this time, than I should think of doing so myself.

"By the way, when did you say you intended going to Darcey Hall?"

"I had arranged to leave town the latter end of next week; but in a letter I received last night from Captain Murray, he desires me to be in readiness for starting early on Thursday morning. What a fine, noble, generous, frank creature he must be! Although wholly unknown to each other, his letter is as full of kindness and affection as though we had been friends from our earliest childhood."

"Ay, ay!" said the little woman, trying to look unconcerned, though bursting with a secret she would fain have told; "and so you never even saw each other?"

"No; I was exceedingly grieved at being out when he called to-day, and, I imagine, there is no chance of our meeting until we leave for Suffolk,

that is, if I understood my servant rightly, he said the Captain would be out of town till Wednesday night, and so, of course——”

“No of course at all.”

“Why, what do you know about the matter?”

“Nothing! there, nothing! Does your servant always deliver messages exactly as they are given?”

“Well, now; don’t look so provokingly inquiring; and so you think it’s not likely you shall see the Captain for three days at least? Humph! perhaps, yes; perhaps, no;” continued Miss Bridgenorth, smiling with inward satisfaction; “never be too sure of anything, friend Felix.”

“I never am,” returned he, laughing; “but see how full the rooms are getting.”

“Yes; and is it not odd, very odd, that I am the only one, beside dear Mrs. Morton here, who knows anything about the affair, or guesses what this brilliant party is given for? There they are, dancing away, and looking as well pleased as if every individual, he or she, were to be king and queen of the feast; but I’ll soon set them to rights; only wait a little longer, good folks, and you shall be undeceived. Monstrous provoking though, is it not? ’Twas very particularly stupid of me to come without him; I ought and should have called for him in my way here, only I wanted to be the first, because I had a bit of a secret I wished to tell Mrs. Morton before the company arrived. Those abominable clubs! I want to get a law passed, prohibiting any man, under pain of a severe penalty, ever entering one again, and then, you know, if nobody went to them, why they must, of necessity, soon become extinct.”

“A wise law would that be, doubtless; but pray tell me, my dear Miss Bridgenorth, what may be

the peculiar cause of your present hostility to places we single men, ay, and married ones too, perhaps, look upon as second homes?"

"Exactly, and that's just the very cause why I hate them. What business have a parcel of men ('tis bad enough, in all conscience, for the single ones, but ten thousand times worse for those who have wives and children) to be gossiping and wasting their hours, talking all sorts of scandal, and hatching every species of mischief, in such places. Never tell me about old women and tea-tables! Your clubs beat us hollow, out-and-out again! There's more evil reports, more scandalous stories, and more ill-natured speeches made and sent forth in one day from the club-houses, than were ever concocted by all the ancient spinsters, over all the bright teapots in England, since tea was known until this moment! For my part, I should not be sorry to hear the whole pack of them were burnt to the ground; ay, every one!"

"What! not even *mine* excepted?"

"No, not even *yours* excepted."

"Well, now; that appears quite contrary to the usual forethought and sagacity with which you argue and decide upon all weighty matters, and permit me to say, in this instance, you are clearly at fault."

"No, indeed, I am not; it is a subject I have argued and decided upon times out of number, and both argument and decision invariably travel the same way."

"That is——"

"That is, club-houses are a general nuisance, and should be entirely done away with! Why, now, is not this a case in point? I'll be bound my 'Lion,' instead of being here two hours ago, lis-

tening to all the good things I had to say, (I repeat *had*, because I am afraid, if he stays away much longer, they will have vanished out of my head,) instead, I say, of listening to and applauding all the fine and wise speeches I have been two days and a night preparing for him, I bet any wager he will come in about midnight, with 'I'm exceedingly sorry to be so late, but I was detained at my club.' I think if I've been told that once, I have a thousand times.

"Bad as those places are in themselves, you all add to the abhorrence in which we women hold them, by making them scape-goats for every description of omission and unpunctuality from the first of January to the thirty-first of December."

"What a tirade! But I am sadly afraid you suffer your indignation to supersede your judgment. To say nothing of the monstrous injustice you are guilty of, for *that*, I think, had better not be even glanced at.

"Now, it appears to me, they are the best possible places to get idle men out of harm's way, and keep them from mischief."

"Keep them *from* mischief! Lead them *into* it, you mean."

"Well, well! You shall have it all your own way, for this evening at least."

"Dear me!" said the little woman, starting, and turning first red and then pale; "how long it is since I heard that name!" as a servant announced, in a loud voice, "Sir William Mountmorris." "I wonder if he is any relation to——"

"To one of the greatest villains that ever disgraced the name of man!" replied Sir Felix Greyling, his lips quivering with intense emotion, and his eyes flashing fire. "Yes, distantly, very dis-

tantly. I dislike hearing the name even ; it brings back such fearful thoughts, and calls all my worst passions into play. I would have given much rather than met that man here to-night, for though we are only known to each other by sight, the *name* is always sufficient to unhinge me for hours. He was a specious villain !”

“ Well, well ! He shall be the worst man England ever produced,” said she, endeavouring to recover her gaiety, though, from the trembling of her whole frame, it was not difficult to perceive she was almost as deeply agitated as her companion. “ Well, well ! He shall be the worst man England ever produced, if it will please you ; for, really, you are looking so vastly like an ogre, that I am not sufficiently courageous to run the risk of being eaten up, which, I fear, would inevitably be the case were I rash enough to provoke your ire.

“ They say the race of ogres are monstrously tenacious concerning their own opinion, and I do not feel disposed to test the truth of that assertion just now, believe me.”

“ If anything could make me look like an ogre,” replied Sir Felix, attempting to smile, (for he well knew the expression his features bore at that moment must be, as they always were, when such terrible feelings agitated him, perfectly startling,) “ it is the mention of that name ; and I wonder, my dear Miss Bridgenorth, that you, who must have known him for the blackest, the deepest, the most execrable villain that ever stained——”

“ Mercy on us ! I knew him for no such thing ; besides, you quite terrify me with those strange looks, and dreadful words. I’m sure Henry Mountmorris, at least when I knew him, was not a *bad* man ; he might have been a little wild, but as to

his being a *villain*, I should as much think of calling you one."

"I would not willingly cross his path, be he living; neither would I have any one defend him in my hearing, be he dead; for were it my dearest friend who should attempt to gloss the memory of so arch an hypocrite, I would not answer for the consequences; but let us drop the subject; it was an unfortunate one to start at such a time as this; and I pray, my dear Miss Bridgenorth, if you have any regard for my feelings, never again mention the hated name of Henry Mountmorris when I am present; it quite unmans me, by recalling a terrible vow I once made, and which——"

"Ah, yes, yes! I promise faithfully; I have as little wish to dwell on by-gones as you possibly can; but see, Mrs. Morton is beckoning me to her; I know 'tis to ask some questions about my 'Lion,' mind you don't stir till I come back—mind," and away she bustled.

"Will you oblige me with a few minutes' conversation," said a tall, handsome man, slightly touching the arm of Sir Felix Greyling, and laying a marked emphasis on the word *oblige*.

"Certainly, sir, but——"

"Follow me, then," replied the other sternly; and he led the way down stairs.

"Now, sir," said the stranger, when they had reached the hall, "now, sir, I would know by what authority, or upon what grounds, you have thus most unjustifiably taken upon yourself the task of defaming, with a rancour for which it would be difficult to account, the name of as honourable and as upright a man as ever breathed?"

"Sir, who you are, or what you may be, that thus presume to call me to account for words ut-

tered in a conversation I am not aware was particularly intended for your ear, I shall not take the trouble to inquire; but as you have voluntarily undertaken to defend the character of one, than whom no greater villain ever existed——”

“Foul slanderer! it is base enough to defame the living when absent—but to traduce the dead, is indeed dastardly and pitiful.”

“I would have you be more temperate in your language, sir,” said Sir Felix Greyling, drawing himself up to his full height, and reddening with suppressed anger, “such words as those you have just made use of may not be tamely put up with, or easily overlooked.

“I insist upon an immediate apology, or——”

“Retract every word you uttered five minutes ago; acknowledge yourself in error—own that you have said what is false——”

“Never, never! the man I spoke of was all—more—worse, a thousand times worse, than I described him!—a deeper, blacker miscreant never lived.”

“Liar!” shouted the stranger. “I give thee the lie in thy teeth; for never breathed there a truer, more upright, or more honourable gentleman than him thou hast so vilely, foully slandered!”

“And I hurl the lie back upon thee; for never existed a more finished hypocrite—a greater scoundrel—than him who owned the name of Henry Mountmorris!”

“False man!”

“The falsehood rests with you for defending one so base as, if you knew aught of Henry Mountmorris, you must have known him to be.”

“Will you retract?”

“I will not.”

"Then there is but *one* way of settling this," said the stranger, drawing a card from his pocket, and demanding his from Sir Felix Greyling.

'Twas a fearful moment that, as the eye of each young man rested on the other's name.

"Murray!"

"Greyling!"

Exclaimed both at the same instant. "Is it thus we meet?" and their voices sounded hoarse and hollow.

Alas, alas! that such things should be. There they stood—those two noble, generous, gifted beings; they who but a few short hours before had looked forward with joyful anticipations to the moment when each should clasp the other's hand in all the warmth of friendship and brotherly love—yes, there they stood, gazing in speechless agony on the tortured features of him who, perhaps, ere the next sun had set, might be lying, a stiff and mangled corpse, murdered by the brother, or the lover's hand.

Woe for thee, sweet Bertha! thy bright visions are all, all dispelled!

Oh! it was a terrible moment that; terrible beyond what language can convey!

"It is too late—too late!" groaned Augustus Murray, striking his breast as one might do, over whose intellects reason no longer held her sway—"too, too late!" and dashing from the house, he sought his way, bewildered and stunned, to his hotel.

"I cannot meet him—I *will not*," ejaculated Sir Felix Greyling, drawing his breath hard, and setting his teeth like a person suffering under some excruciating bodily torture.

"No, no, it must not be; I had rather turn the



weapon against my own heart. Should he fall, Oh, Father of Mercy!—what have I done!—what shall I do? So, *that* is Augustus Murray—Bertha's brother—and I—I may be his murderer; oh, horror, horror!—pitying Heaven, have mercy on me!" almost shrieked the wretched man, when staggering into the street, he hurriedly called a cab, and was driven home.

Honour! Pale, heart-stricken widow! Poor, fatherless child! Do ye not feel the glory of *such* Honour?—too well do ye know this is no tale of *fiction*!

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## CHAPTER XXV.

WHEN little Miss Bridgenorth bustled back to her post at the drawing-room door, she was both surprised and vexed to find Sir Felix Greyling no longer there. After bobbing up and down till her head ached, standing on tip-toe, that she might peep over the shoulders of all the short people, and under the arms of those who were tall, to make certain he was not among them, she commenced a tour of the apartments.

Mingling with the throng of waltzers, she stopped every couple that were whirling by, to make sure each individual dancer was not Sir Felix; and then having satisfied herself upon that head, she began making anxious and minute inquiries as to whether any one there had seen him.

"Do pray let us finish this round, my dear Miss Bridgenorth," said the gay Colonel Devereux. "I declare it is too bad of you to stop us in this cruel

way ; here have I been waiting all the evening until Miss Fitzgerald was disengaged ; and now she has condescended to grant my humble petition for her hand, you are barbarous enough to part those whom unwearying patience on one side, and sweet pity on the other, has at last——”

“Just fancy ! nonsense, nonsense ; fiddle-de-dee Colonel, you are always talking some rubbish or other. Tell me, now, have you seen Sir Felix Greyling within these last ten minutes ? I left him standing by the door-way when I went to speak to Mrs. Morton ; he promised me he wouldn’t stir an inch until I came back—and now he’s gone, and I can’t even see any one like him.”

“Would seeing any one *like* him answer your present purpose, my dear Miss Bridgenorth ?” because if that is all you seek, look at me.”

“Look at you—look at *you*—when I want Sir Felix Greyling !—why in the name of goodness how would that help me to find him, when you declare you have not seen him the whole evening ?”

“I declare no such thing, because I *have* seen him, and seen him, too, flirting away with you, at a most furious rate, for the last three hours, though certainly not within the time you mention, as having, like a sunbeam, vanished from your view ; but you seemed disturbed that you could not catch a glimpse of any one *like* him even. Now I say, look at me, and you cannot fail to be struck by the resemblance ; he is reckoned extremely handsome, and—so am *I*. Am I not right ?” said he, laughingly, turning to his beautiful partner ; “I know you will say ‘Yes.’”

“I will say you are one of the vainest men I ever met with,” replied the pretty Ellen Fitzgerald.

"Well, anything *you* say must be right, and so I suppose I am. Will you allow us to continue our evolutions, or are you waiting to be my next partner, Miss Bridgenorth?" continued the merry Colonel, attempting to put his arm round the little woman's waist.

"Lor! don't worry me! I cannot see him; where can he be?" and off she trotted, jostling, and elbowing her way, right and left, until she reached the card-room, where, though she perfectly well knew *that* was about the very last place in the house she might be likely to find Sir Felix Greyling, (as he never played cards, and abominated the sight of them,) she walked round each table in turn, peeped into the face of every player in succession, until, convinced of what she might have known before she entered, that him she sought was not there, she ran down stairs, and hurrying into the study, rang the bell violently.

"Have you seen anything of Sir Felix Greyling within this last quarter of an hour, Paget?" inquired she anxiously of the servant who answered her summons.

"No, mem; but——"

"But what?"

"Why, mem, I announced Captain Murray."

"Captain Murray! How long ago? When? Where was I?" demanded poor Miss Bridgenorth, in breathless eagerness. "Tell me, for the love of Heaven, tell me all about it."

"Why, mem, all I know is this:—About half-an-hour ago, or perhaps not quite so much, I announced a very tall, handsome gentleman, who gave his name as Captain Murray; but the rooms being so crowded, and the music playing exceedingly loud at the time, I could not make myself

heard, I was just a-going to repeat his name, when he turned round, and said with a smile, 'Never mind, I can manage to make myself known without *that*.' And so you see, mem, of course I bowed, and came away, for, as I knew the company must be nearly all arrived, and as I——"

"Well, never mind what you *did*, and *thought*—tell me what you *heard*, and *saw*."

"Why, mem, *I* neither heard, nor saw, anything more myself; because, as I was going to observe——"

"Pray, don't torment me with your observations, my good Paget! Can you not see what a state of anxiety I am in! Do tell me what became of Sir Felix Greyling, and Captain Murray. Did any of the servants see them leave the house?"

"Not exactly, mem; but James says, as he was going up stairs with a tray of ices, he met Sir Felix Greyling and a tall gentleman coming down. They both appeared to be a good deal excited, and he told me they were speaking loud and angrily when they got into the hall."

"Dear me! dear me! what can it all mean! There is something wrong—I am *sure* there is! What shall I do?—what shall I do? Go, go, send James to me directly!"

"Yes, mem!" and Paget bowed himself out at the door.

"James," said Miss Bridgenorth, when that worthy entered, "do tell me all you know about this strange business. Tell me all—everything."

"What strange business, mem?" asked James, looking rather alarmed, "I—I——"

"What was it you heard Captain Murray saying to Sir Felix Greyling, when you met them on the stairs?"

"I heard nothing, mem."

"*Nothing!* Why Paget says you told him they were talking very loudly, and appeared to be quarrelling."

"No, mem, not exactly *that*. I cannot aver I heard the gentlemen at high words, but I thought they looked heated; though I have frequently seen gentlemen, while talking politics, appear quite as angry, and speak as loud, when nothing has come of it—that is, I mean, no disagreeable consequences."

"Dear me! how you do prevaricate! I thought you said, half a minute ago, they were *not* quarrelling."

"Yes, mem; but you see, mem——"

"You will drive me distracted! *Do* tell me the truth, or leave the room! I am in no humour to be trifled with," said poor Miss Bridgenorth, trembling with apprehension. "There is something wrong—very wrong—I am sure of it! *Will* you tell me the truth, James? *Do*, I implore you, disguise nothing from me. Tell me all—everything you know—about the matter. Mischief will—*must* come of this, I am certain; and I, I only shall be to blame."

Now, James being an exceedingly cautious person when speaking to his superiors, was weighing in his own sapient head, whether he should tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, or whether he should relate what he heard and saw, not as it really happened, but as he chose to make it appear, for, argued he, "If all this comes to nothing (which I very much doubt,) and I make a story of it, I shall be laughed at for a busybody, but if, on the other hand, it turns to something, (which I am certain it will,) why, then, I

shall get credit for my penetration ;" so, having arrived at this sage conclusion, in a far shorter space of time than nine gentlemen out of ten belonging to his profession possibly could have done, he hemmed three times, and thus began :—

" Well, then, mem, the case is this:—As I was going up stairs to the drawing-room, with a tray of ices, I met two gentlemen a-coming down—one was Sir Felix Greyling, the other I did not know, but——"

" What was he like ?"

" Why, mem, he was tall, and very handsome. Indeed, I may say, almost the finest man I ever saw ; for, as he passed under the lamp, I had a full view of his face, and——"

" Were they talking when you met them ?"

" The stranger gentleman was on first, coming down very hurriedly, and Sir Felix Greyling came a step or two behind. They were not talking *then*, but they both looked angry and flushed,"

" Gracious heavens ! Well, well, what did you observe next ?"

" By the time I got to the drawing-room door, they had reached the hall ; but as I was afraid something might be wrong, I stopped for a moment on the landing-place, and heard the stranger gentleman speaking loud, but I could not catch what he said, so I went into the room, and when I returned they had both disappeared."

" And that is all you know ?"

" Yes, mem, all."

" Go and tell your mistress I should feel obliged if she could come here for a few minutes, as I have something particular to say to her."

" Yes, mem ; have you any further commands for me ?" inquired the obsequious James.

"No ; go, go, be quick."

When Mrs. Morton entered the study, she found her poor friend pacing up and down in great distress, evidently excited by some painfully powerful feeling.

"What is the matter, my dear Miss Bridgenorth?" exclaimed she, astonished and distressed at the look of anxiety and suffering visible on the usually cheerful and happy face of her warm-hearted little friend. "What can have happened in this short interval to disturb you thus? Why, it is not half an hour ago you left me all smiles and gaiety. Tell me, dear, what is all this about?"

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Morton!" replied she, bursting into tears, "I fear there will be mischief, dreadful mischief, and all through *my* folly! I am the cause; it will all lay at my door! Oh, what is to be done! What—what is to be done!"

"You! *you* the cause of mischief, dear Hetty! *You*, who are always endeavouring to make every one happy that has the good fortune to be near you. No, no, believe me, there is some mistake; but try and compose yourself—pray do, my dear friend, and tell me what it is that thus agitates you."

"I will," replied poor Hetty, endeavouring to check the tears that fell thick and fast down her cheeks, "I may be wrong—Heaven grant I am!—but I know both their excitable dispositions so well, and looks such as James describes could come from nothing less than an affront, either real or imaginary, and the one, with such tempers as theirs, is quite as bad as the other.

"Think of the horror! Oh, mercy! mercy!" groaned she; "just think if they should have quarrelled, and challenged each other as strangers, they will both be killed!—both! Father of goodness,

have pity on me, I shall go wild!" cried she, wringing her hands, and again bursting into a passionate fit of weeping.

"In the name of heaven what can all this mean! Do explain yourself, Hetty, I am quite terrified! Who will send a challenge? and how can *you* be in fault?"

"I ought not to have left the door," sobbed she, "but how ever could I imagine that in so short a space of time angry words should pass between strangers such as they were to each other. No, no," cried she, as a gleam of hope shot through her brain; "it cannot be, the whole thing must be a misrepresentation, a story, got up by James to frighten me!—it must! it must! Oh, that——"

"Stay, stay, dear Hetty! will you answer me a few questions straightforward, without any remark of your own? Try and be calm. If you keep breaking out in that way, I shall never get to understand the rights of this distressing affair. Sit down, pray do, dear, and answer me as clearly and composedly as you can. Who is it you suspect of having disagreed?"

"Captain Murray, and Sir Felix Greyling."

"Why?"

"Because, when I came across the room to speak to you, the last time we exchanged words in the drawing-room, I left Sir Felix Greyling standing by the doorway. I was waiting to introduce him to Captain Murray, and he promised me he would not go away till I came back. When I returned, he was no longer there, and James says, he met him, and a tall, handsome man, coming hurriedly down stairs, both looking flushed and angry; since which time, neither of them have been seen in the house."



"Humph!" said Mrs. Morton, while her countenance assumed a grave, thoughtful expression. "Do you remember what you were talking about when you left Sir Felix Greyling?"

"Yes, perfectly; and 'tis that which puzzles me so; for it was upon a subject that, even supposing Murray had overheard every word, he could not possibly have felt the slightest interest in what passed between us, and I'm certain Sir Felix was far, far too deeply absorbed in his own reflections very readily to begin another."

"At what time did Paget say he announced Captain Murray?"

"From all I can gather, I should say precisely at the time we were in a warm debate about the character of poor Henry Mountmorris——"

"Merciful powers! and was *that* the name upon Sir Felix Greyling's lips at the moment you imagine Augustus Murray to have entered the room?" exclaimed Mrs. Morton, now seriously alarmed.

"Yes,—but why do you look so terrified?"

"Oh, my dear friend! I fear there *will* be mischief, but let us be calm; it can do no good to give way to unavailing lamentations, and Heaven grant they may prove unnecessary fears. Can you call to mind the exact words used by Sir Felix Greyling?"

"Clearly do I remember,—he said there was not a greater villain in existence than him who had once owned the name of Henry Mountmorris."

"And you have reason to believe that Captain Murray was near enough to hear this?"

"If he was in the room at all, he must, without doubt, for he could not possibly have passed us unless we had made way for him. The only position in which he could have been without my discovering him, was in the recess at the side of von

back drawing room door, and against that, Greyling had been leaning the whole time we were talking."

"Terrible!" cried Mrs. Morton; "I foresee it all; what is to be done?"

"But how can Augustus Murray have any interest in, or feel himself called upon to resent insulting words uttered in dispraise of Henry Mountmorris,—a person he never saw, and perhaps never heard of?"

"Henry Mountmorris was the husband of Augustus Murray's mother," said Mrs. Morton, sadly, struggling to suppress the fearfully conflicting emotions that were agitating her almost beyond endurance; "the man whom Murray had always loved and revered as a father."

"What!" shrieked Miss Bridgenorth, "what! oh, in the name of pity do not say so! you cannot mean it!"

"Alas, alas! it is too true," replied Mrs. Morton, bursting into tears. "Oh, there has been some fatal mistake; they have told him Mr. Darcy's former name, but nothing of his history. I tremble to think what may happen; the mention of that name is poison to the ears of Sir Felix."

"Yes, all is lost," groaned poor Miss Bridgenorth, covering her face with her hands, and rocking backwards and forwards on her chair like one in extreme pain. "All, all is lost!—they will both fall, and I—I ——"

"Hush, hush, dear Hetty, do not say such terrible things; our misery is great enough without adding to it. I cannot think they will meet each other; explanation must take place, and apology be accepted;—and yet," continued Mrs. Morton, after a pause, "Bertha told me that her brother

entertained so strong a regard for his mother's husband, that she was certain he would call any one to a strict account who should dare speak disrespectfully of him, and words such as those you say Sir Felix uttered, if heard by Captain Murray, are not very likely to be passed over in silence. I would I knew how to act, but the mornings now are so early light, and such meetings always take place as soon after daybreak as possible, that, even supposing we could guess where they would go, I do not see how it could be prevented. Oh! that——"

"And so Henry Mountmorris murdered Sir Cutbert Greyling?" said Miss Bridgenorth, suddenly starting up and placing herself immediately before Mrs. Morton, her face and lips blanched to a death-like hue, and her whole frame trembling. "Why did you not tell me this? Yes, he murdered his dearest, best friend,—monster! Oh!" continued she, bitterly, "and to such a wretch had I given my heart's first, purest love; but Heaven be praised he knew it not."

"Tell me," cried she, again sinking on a chair quite overcome by the violent emotion that shook her, "tell me, when did the horrible transaction take place?"

"About six months after you went to live in Ireland; and you know you were away nearly twelve years; when you returned, all the terrible interest caused by the frightful affair had long died away; Sir Felix was abroad,—Mountmorris's name was almost forgotten,—you never mentioned any of the parties to me, and I always avoided the subject as much as possible, because anything connected with it was painfully distressing; hence it is, I suppose, you never heard the rights of the melancholy story; but you knew Sir Cutbert Greyling was killed in a duel, did you not?"

"Yes, yes ; but not by whose hand he fell. Are you sure, *quite* sure, that Mr. Darcey and Henry Mountmorris were one and the same person ?"

"Quite,—I have not a shadow of doubt about it."

"But how came you to find it out? Did you ever see Mr. Darcey ?"

"No; but when Bertha Murray was staying with me, about three years ago, she shewed me a miniature, which she said was the likeness of her father, (you know they both almost always called Mr. Darcey 'father,' and, I am sure, loved him as such.) Bertha told me Mr. Darcey said the likeness had been taken when he was about five-and-twenty, and intended for her mother; but Fate forbid that he should be so placed as to offer it, and he had kept it through all his wanderings, with the vague hope that a time would come when it might be accepted, and, continued Bertha, smiling, 'the time did come, but mamma said it called to mind many things she would fain forget, and so she would not keep it. Mr. Darcey gave it to me as a worthless thing, and I have it with me now.' From some remarks Bertha made about the strangeness of Mr. Darcey's manner while giving her his miniature, I was curious to see it, and you may easily guess my amazement at beholding the never-to-be-forgotten features of Henry Mountmorris. You remember what a very remarkable expression his face had at times, and the painter had caught the exact look. I think I never saw a more striking likeness in my life."

"You feel convinced that the miniature in our dear Bertha's possession was no other than the likeness of Henry Mountmorris ?"

"Most fully; there could be no possibility of a mistake. Ellen Romer's second husband was Henry Mountmorris !"

"But how, in the name of all that is wonderful, did it happen that Bertha never should have chanced to hear her father's former name mentioned? I knew her when she was quite a child, and in the whole course of our intimacy she has not once, in the most remote way, hinted that she knew, or thought of him other than he then appeared."

"No,—at that time she did not, but she does now."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes,—in a letter she wrote me before they went to Switzerland, she told me Mr. Darcey had revealed everything to her. Poor girl! it must have been a frightful trial. He made her promise, that while he lived she would not allow Sir Felix Greyling to continue his addresses. The unhappy man felt full sure his days were numbered, that he was not long for this world; and Bertha declared, so terrible were his sufferings at the bare thought of meeting Sir Felix Greyling face, to face, that, rather than embitter his last moments, as she knew too well the sight of Sir Felix must do, she would voluntarily become an exile from her home, nor see her lover more."

"Dear, noble Bertha! it must have wrung her gentle heart, for surely never did two human beings love each other with more intense affection than Felix Greyling, and Bertha Murray; but how could it happen, that, while she knew all, Augustus should have been kept so completely in the dark?"

"You know Captain Murray was abroad at the time Sir Felix Greyling first saw, and fell in love with Bertha. It was upon the occasion of Greyling's writing to Mr. Darcey for his approbation and consent to their union, that the wretched man felt himself compelled to lay bare some actions of his

former life, more particularly all that related to the fatal duel. How great must have been poor Bertha's horror as, one after another, those terrible facts were revealed to her !"

"But do you think that Mountmorris was so deeply to blame in the dreadful affair as the hatred Greyling evidently entertains even for his memory would lead one to suppose ?"

"It is difficult to say,—there was much of mystery connected with the whole proceeding. I believe no one but Sir Felix himself knows exactly how it occurred. After his father fell, the body was brought to our house, it being much nearer to the fatal spot where the duel was fought than his own. Young Felix Greyling, at that time a lad about sixteen, was passing his holidays with my brother. Arthur and he were inseparable friends ; the boys were just of an age, and spent their Eton vacations alternately at Bellevue, and Park Place ; indeed, so great was the friendship existing between Henry Mountmorris, Sir Cutbert Greyling, and my father, that our families were scarcely ever separated. Well, it so chanced, that at the precise moment his father's bleeding corpse was being borne into our hall, Felix, Arthur, and myself, who was then a mere romping girl, were racing in full pursuit of a beautiful canary that had escaped from its cage. Felix being the most eager of the party to recapture his pet, ran heedlessly on, without observing where he went, and, oh ! never shall I forget the horror of that moment, or the wild shriek of agony he uttered, when recovering himself from the check his headlong speed had received, he found he had struck against a man who was supporting the lifeless form of his beloved father. Poor boy ! 'tis said there are moments in the existence of some per-

sons, when the sight of anything that is very terrible will have power to change their entire nature, and so it was with Felix Greyling ; from being, without exception, one of the most light-hearted and gay creatures I ever met with, he appeared suddenly transformed from a happy, laughing boy, to a stern, gloomy man ; indeed, I have been told, that for many years after his father's death, he was never seen to smile."

"Was Sir Cutbert quite dead when they brought him to Belleveue?"

"Quite ; one of the attendants gave Felix a letter he had taken from Sir Cutbert's pocket, and surely never was anything more fearful than the boy's countenance while reading it ; his eyes actually blazed with fury, and dropping on his knees beside the blood-stained corpse of his father, he took his cold hand, and pressing it to his convulsed lips, swore a terrible oath to revenge that father's murder. 'I will keep the secret,' muttered he, 'for the sake of others, but let me stand face to face with that miscreant wretch, and, oh ! Henry Mountmorris, dearly shalt thou rue thy black treachery, thou dastardly villain !'"

"But surely it could never have been possible for such a man as Henry Mountmorris *once* was, to—to——"

"I know what you would say, and it is the doubt of that which involves the whole matter in such perplexity, though certain I am there must have been something very disgraceful in the transaction that brought about their quarrel, for Sir Cutbert Greyling was one of the most easy, unsuspecting, and amiable beings breathing. Our conclusions can come from nothing but surmise, because, as I said before, none other than Sir Felix himself

knows the *truth*, though I have argued the dreadful transaction over in my own mind so often, and viewed it in every possible point, and I feel convinced that nothing less than dishonourable conduct on the part of Mountmorris could have led to such disastrous consequences.

"I am more fully convinced my conjectures are right, from Sir Felix Greyling's manner upon one or two occasions. It is very rarely the name of Mountmorris has been mentioned in my hearing when he was present, but whenever it did so chance, I always remarked a kind of——"

"Yes, yes, a terrible look, not so much of hate, as scorn,—deep, utter, contemptuous scorn."

"Exactly—that is the very word, and I am certain there is worse to tell than we know of."

"You say Mr. Darcey told Bertha all; did she not even hint that such had been the case?"

"No; of course, poor girl, she was delicate about exposing the dark deeds of her mother's husband more than was absolutely necessary to explain their reason for so suddenly leaving England. Dear child! I can easily understand the motive that prompted her to withhold all and everything from Augustus which might tend to lower Mr. Darcey in his esteem; but it was a fatal error. Poor Bertha! How little could she foresee what evil might arise from the mistaken kindness of keeping that secret, which he should have known, and only telling him Mr. Darcey's former name, the thing of all others he should *not* have been told until fully acquainted with every particular of his miserable story."

"Then you think that in his last letter, Sir Cuthbert informed his son of all that led to their quarrel, but insisted upon Felix keeping it secret?"



"I do ; for so great had been the friendship existing between their families, and so extreme was the regard and affection Sir Cutbert entertained for Mrs. Mountmorris, Henry's mother, who was then living, and Lady Farley, his sister, who had been the bosom friend of Lady Greyling, that, doubtless, he could not bear the idea of inflicting unnecessary misery upon those he had loved so well, by letting the world know how foul had been the actions of one it delighted to honour."

"Supper, mem," said a servant, throwing open the door ; "the company are waiting for you, mem."

"I am in no humour or state of feeling to play the agreeable hostess," said Mrs. Morton, sadly ; it will be a heavy task. Go, Francis," continued she to the man, who stood lingering ; for that something unusual was going on, James had given his companions fully to understand, and Francis, after having in vain listened at the study door till he was tired, thought he might as well try to pick up some trifle, were it only a few words, to assist in making out the marvellous tale about which they were all so deeply interested in the servants' hall.

"Did you hear me speak, Francis ?" demanded his mistress, rather angrily, of the obsequious gentleman in waiting, who was most assiduously arranging, and rearranging every chair in the room, though they were very particularly well placed, and could have got through the night tolerably comfortable without his assistance—"Go ; I will come directly."

"Yes, mem," bowed Francis, and walking to the door, he slowly closed it after him, but having found all attempts perfectly unavailing to catch anything like sound of voices through the well-

baized doors, he contented himself by giving a grunt of disappointment, and descended the stairs to relate to his much-wondering friends what he had *not* heard.

"I *must* go, dear Hetty, but I will not ask you to return with me," said Mrs. Morton, kindly, "for I know, in the present state of your feelings, the noisy merriment of our gay friends would be more than you could bear.

"I must join them, though I go with a heavy heart; I sincerely trust they will not stay very late, for I feel exceedingly ill. Good-bye, dear, I will be with you again as soon as I possibly can."

"What *is* to be done?" ejaculated poor little Miss Bridgenorth, clasping her hands in agony, and again bursting into tears the moment Mrs. Morton left the room. "Something *must* and *shall* be done to prevent them killing each other.

"I'll send—no, I'll go myself—I'll go to Bow-street the moment it is light. I don't care what may be said or thought about it. If they should fight, and either of them fall, I—I shall have been their murderer. Oh! Father of mercies, take pity on me!" and wholly unable longer to bear up against the many miserable reflections that tortured her, poor Miss Bridgenorth sank back in a strong fainting fit on the sofa, in which state she was found by Mrs. Morton, when returning, weary and wretched, from that gay scene, where a few hours before, they had both shone the brightest, the gayest, the happiest of the crowd. Such are this world's pleasures,—fleeting, empty, hollow shadows!"

## CHAPTER XXVI.

"WHY, Murray, Murray!" exclaimed the loud voice of Frederick Villiers, as they both met upon the steps of Mivart's hotel; "in the name of all that's wonderful, man, what have you been doing? Why, Heaven save us," continued the thoughtless young man, frightened for a moment into gravity, as his eye fell upon the blanched lips and heated brow of Augustus, while passing under the full blaze of a gas lamp,—“Heaven save us! you reel and stagger as if you had been drinking more than you knew how to carry, and your face is looking absolutely ghastly. There's something wrong, I can see. Come, take hold of my arm, that's a good fellow, and I'll help you up stairs, for I am sure you are not able to find the way alone.

"What is all this about?" asked Villiers, when they had reached Captain Murray's apartments, and Augustus, sinking on a chair, hastily tore off his stock, and motioned his companion to open a window, gasping as if in the last stage of suffocation. "Come, come, Murray, bear up; this will never do, man. Could you but see yourself in a glass, you would be absolutely startled at your own frightful appearance. Do talk, for Heaven's sake; I cannot endure to see you so."

"I wont meet him," said Augustus, suddenly starting up, and pacing the room with a heavy, uneven tread. "Call me dastard, coward—anything you will—I *cannot*, and *will not* meet him—I'll die first."

"Murray, I'm ashamed of you. And *are* you

throwing yourself into this miserable state of excited agitation because you have got an opportunity of proving yourself an honourable man!" exclaimed the astonished and indignant Frederick Villiers. "Had any one dared to tell me that Captain Murray was heard to utter such sentiments, I'd have called him out—I would, as I'm a living man—and shot him like a dog."

"What *am* I to do?" said the unhappy young man. "I know there is no escape, and yet—yet——"

"Escape!" repeated the other, contemptuously; "pray do not make use of such vile words, Captain Murray, or I must really cut you."

"Villiers," said Augustus, turning fiercely round upon his goader, "you are talking about what you don't understand; either be silent, or leave the room, I entreat you. Give me a few minutes to arrange my thoughts, and then, perhaps, I may need your assistance."

"In all affairs of honour, my services are ready at any man's bidding," said the loquacious Villiers, pompously.

See how we may pervert the use of words, until we forget their original meaning.

Here was a thing of gilt buttons and gold chains talking largely to one of England's noblest, bravest defenders about honour! A poor, silly, trifling, thoughtless, conceited fop!—a popinjay jack—while smoothing his embroidered waistcoat, and shaking his scented ringlets, holding forth in pompous strains about the laws of honour—a thing concerning which he knew as much as the frizzled valet who brushed that gay waistcoat every morning, and papered those scented ringlets every night. Here was a thing of shreds and patches threaten-

ing to *cut* Augustus Murray, the bravest captain that ever trod the quarter-deck of a British man-of-war, because, forsooth, he shrank with horror at the thoughts of shooting a fellow-creature "like a dog," for having uttered some few inadvertent words!

"Do you know Sir Felix Greyling?" demanded Augustus, in a hollow voice, after a few minutes' pause, in which he had been vainly endeavouring to still those terrible emotions that shook his frame to its very centre. "Will you take a message to him from me?"

"Most joyfully," said the heartless puppy; "I know his house well; what am I to say?"

"We have quarrelled, and must meet," answered Murray, hoarsely. "Do not compel me to enlarge upon the dreadful business; I will leave it in your hands."

"And you could not have placed the affair in better. Pistols or swords?"

"God of heaven, man, you will drive me to distraction!" said Augustus Murray, wildly. "Neither,—I wont meet him."

"Captain Murray!" exclaimed Frederick Villiars, trying to look important, "what am I to understand by this strange conduct. I have had the pleasure of being both principal and second in many affairs of honour," (this was a favourite boast of the gallant Frederick,) "and permit me to observe, that I never met with such an extraordinary manner of conducting honourable meetings before, and what is more, you compel me to remark, that unless you proceed in a manner better suited to the business in hand, I must really decline attending you to the ground."

"Stop, stop, Villiars, I have no intention of of-

fending you ; but my feelings are in such a strange state of bewilderment, that I hardly know what I am either saying or doing.

“ Go to Sir Felix Greyling, and tell him——”

“ Yes, yes, I understand ; pistols, of course,” said the second, brightening up, when he found the pleasure he had anticipated, of being able to add another laurel to his brow by again becoming second in an affair of honour, was likely to be gratified.

“ Yes, I understand ; if he decides upon pistols, I am not to decline them, though I had rather it should be settled by swords, for Sir Felix Greyling is considered one of the best shots in England. Not that he ever fought a duel, I am sorry to say, which has been a cause of wonderment to all who know him, for he can pick off his man at a greater distance than the first marksman in the whole rifle corps. I would give something to be such a prime hit as Sir Felix Greyling. I am tolerably clever ; but, from what I hear, he beats me out, and out. At what time shall I say ? Ah, well, that must be left to him.

“ Where are your pistols, Murray ? I must look at them.”

“ In the chest.”

“ Oh, very well ; I’ll manage to find them, I dare say ; but really you must endeavour to shake off this odd humour that’s on you, or we shall cut but a sorry figure on the ground. Take my advice, and toss off a glass of brandy ; it will quite set you up again. I cannot allow you to appear in this manner—positively I cannot ; you will absolutely disgrace me.”

“ In mercy, Villiars, cease. This is more than I can stand. My brain feels all on fire as it is, and

you appear determined to drive me raving mad. Go with your hateful message, and leave me alone for a few minutes. I am surely going distracted," continued the unhappy man, pursuing his unsteady walk. "I cannot be in my right reason. What will become of me?" cried he, sinking into a chair as Villiars left the room. "Oh! that he would shoot me dead on the spot, ere I had time to present my hateful weapon. No, no!" exclaimed he, vehemently, "I must meet him—I *must*—but I'll not risk the chance of taking his life. What! Augustus Murray become the murderer of Felix Greyling! Never, never! He may shoot me if he will, but I'll not take aim! Let them brand me as a coward—but, as a murderer—*his* murderer, never! My sweet mother, could you guess the bitter misery your wretched son is enduring from his own rashness! Oh, mother, mother! and was the man you called husband—he whom I had been taught to look upon with love and reverence—could he, could he have been so black a villain? And this—this is my welcome home; thus are all my bright hopes of happiness fled. Oh!" groaned he, throwing himself in an agony on a sofa, "what will be the end of it? I dread to think."

It would be a salutary lesson to many, could the dark, the bitter, the fearfully torturing thoughts, that crowded with dreadful intensity on the overwrought brain of those two young men have been laid bare.

What would they not have given to burst the iron chains that bound them in the cursed thralldom of *honour*! and fall weeping, like dear brothers, on each other's necks, asking, and giving, pardon.

But such a course would not have been *honour*—

*able*. They must become *murderers* ere that name could be awarded,

It had passed midnight, when Sir Felix Greyling, who was sitting with his throbbing temples resting on his fevered hands, and almost lost to consciousness, so terrible had been the struggle of the last hour, was partly roused from the torpor into which he had fallen, by a voice saying, in rather an imperative tone, (for the visitor, having entered unobserved by Sir Felix, had been obliged to address the unhappy man several times, ere he succeeded in making himself heard, so completely was he absorbed in his own miserable reflections,)—"I presume, Sir Felix Greyling, you are aware of the nature of my visit?"

"What!" said Sir Felix, raising his heavy, bloodshot eyes to the gay form that stood before him—"Aware of what?"

"That I am the bearer of a hostile message from my friend, Captain Murray."

"I will not meet him!" said Sir Felix, in a voice that made the other start! so wild, so hollow, so sepulchral was it—"I *cannot*!"

"Cannot! Sir Felix Greyling, *cannot*! Am I to return with that answer to Captain Murray?"

"Yes."

"You surely do not intend me to understand that you decline meeting my friend? Why, Sir Felix Greyling, such a proceeding would be unparalleled in the annals of fashionable life. You could never shew your face among honourable men again; indeed, Sir Felix Greyling, I am quite at a loss to comprehend the meaning of all this. I have had the pleasure of being engaged both as principal, and second in several affairs of honour; but, I



must say, this is the most extraordinary case I ever met with ; and, Sir Felix Greyling, permit me to observe, that after what has passed between yourself and Captain Murray, I do not feel myself justified in allowing the matter to rest here. Things have gone much too far to admit of apology—indeed, by what I can gather from my friend's hurried and somewhat incoherent account of the transaction, no other course is left. There must be a meeting ; *must*," repeated the ambassador, in a determined tone. " *We* can receive no compromise ; such affronts must be settled by weapons, not words. Apology is now too late."

And alas ! it was too late. The laws of *honour*—accursed for ever be such laws—allowed of no alternative ; the lie had been given, and retorted ; and one, or both, must become a murderer, or the laws of honour would not be appeased.

Oh ! could some of those wise and good men who have raised England to her present high pinnacle of glory, by their sound judgment and equitable laws, but have witnessed the deep scenes of misery by which the humble writer of these poor pages has been rendered a woe-worn and heart-stricken being for life—would those who *could* amend the evil but view this fearful crime as it really is, and call it by its true name, *murder*—then might we hope to see the detested custom held in abhorrence, and all such as engage in it scorned and shunned, as they deserve to be.

Oh ! the misery that has been caused by that hateful and God-offending practice ; that black blot on our nation's name ; that licensed murder, called duelling ! How many a young and loving wife has had her gentle heart torn and broken !—how many a fair child left fatherless, to struggle through an

unfeeling world, without aid, advice, or guidance ! How many a widowed mother, bowed down with sorrow to the grave, in grief for the murdered, or shame for the murderer, by this fashionable, and honourable crime !

Oh ! you who have the power, have also the will ! Stand forth in our senate, and say, "It shall not be." Put an end to this national disgrace, by rendering the *challenger infamous*, and generations yet unborn shall rise up to bless you.

Surely, surely, was this offence to God, and man, viewed in the light it ought to be,—was duelling considered *disgraceful* instead of *honourable*,—was the name of him who had taken the life of a fellow-creature in revenge for some idle or misconceived word, branded as a murderer, (for what other is he ?) banished his country for ever, as one unfit to mingle with honest men, instead of being sent to prison for a few weeks, where he is visited by his friends, allowed every indulgence and luxury his means will afford, looked upon as a hero, and one who has been hardly dealt by;—was that man, who had wrung the heart of the widow, and orphan, who had cut off a fellow-mortal in the midst of health, strength, folly, and sin, and sent him, without one moment's warning, preparation, or repentance, into the presence of his offended Maker;—was he shunned instead of courted, hated instead of pitied, cast forth from society, as one unfit to mingle with the upright and the just;—would duelling then be any longer *fashionable* ? No ; gentlemen would be more cautious of giving offence ; the *lie* would not be passed as it now is, because a man of *true* honour could scarcely deem the receipt of a few pounds sufficient reparation for foul words. Was there no other means of settling *honourable* differences but

by having recourse to the sober decision of a law court, the great, and noble, would never quarrel. He who now, in the heat of passion, gives licence to his tongue, nor heeds how offensive soever the replies may be, caused by his insulting language, because a *meeting* will bring full satisfaction, would pause, and check his rising wrath, did he know that a five-pound note, perhaps, might be all he'd get in return for standing to hear himself called, liar, scoundrel, villain, and other like opprobrious names.

Let duelling be rendered infamous, be branded as a *crime*, and gentlemen will never quarrel, when they have no longer an *honourable* means of redress.

But to return to our tale, and alas! too true it is.

"Well, Sir Felix Greyling," said the Honourable Frederick Villiars, in his most imposingly authoritative tone, after a pause of considerable length, during which he who was so highly blest as to be enabled to make the proud vaunt of having had "the pleasure of being both principal and second in *many* affairs of honour," stood scanning the distressed being before him, with feelings in which wonder and contempt struggled hard for mastery,—"Well, Sir Felix Greyling; I wait your answer."

"I have none to give."

"Sir?"

"What, in God's name, man, would you drive me to do?" said Sir Felix, wildly.

"To act like a *gentleman*, Sir Felix Greyling," replied the other, laying a strongly marked emphasis on the word "*gentleman*."

"And how may that be?" asked Sir Felix, in a voice rendered frightfully painful by this sudden transition from the fierce hurried way in which he

last spoke, to the deep, cold, sneering, sarcastic tone, by which he marked his utter abhorrence and contempt of such pitiful perversion of words.

"To meet my friend, Captain Murray, for the purpose of giving, and receiving satisfaction for insulting language passed between you, two hours ago, at Mrs. Cleveland Morton's house. Am I understood now, Sir Felix Greyling?" demanded the irate honourable Frederick, wrathfully, "or must I be more explicit?"

"I hear," replied Sir Felix, slowly.

"Well, sir, your answer."

"I will meet him."

"When, Sir Felix?" demanded the emissary, a little mollified at the pleasing turn matters appeared to be taking,—“when, Sir Felix?"

"Six o'clock."

"We have but four hours then, Sir Felix; time runs short. Are you provided with a second?"

"What did you say?" asked Sir Felix, who had again relapsed into that state of almost unconsciousness in which Villiars found him.—“What did you say?"

"Are you provided with a second?" repeated Villiars, speaking in a loud, distinct voice, as if addressing one who was exceedingly deaf.—“Are you provided with a second, or shall I call upon any friend for you?"

"Do you know Colonel Arburthnott?"

"Perfectly."

"Will you go to him, and say, I want him to come and help me murder my friend?" replied the miserable Sir Felix, with a low, hollow laugh. "You can do me this good service, can you not?"

"The men are both surely mad!" muttered Villiars, between his teeth; but not *choosing* to hear

the last part of Sir Felix's speech, he demanded, in a business-like manner, where the meeting should take place ?

"Colonel Arburthnott will settle that," cried the wretched man, impatiently. "In mercy's sake, leave me now, Mr. Villiars ! I am wholly unable to converse with you longer. You will send Colonel Arburthnott to me directly."

"Immediately," said the Honourable Frederick, taking up his hat, and preparing to depart. "We shall hear from you soon ? Six o'clock."

"Yes, yes ; go. Murray, you shall not fall by my hand !" ejaculated Sir Felix, again dropping his head on the table, as Villiars closed the door after him. "No ; I would turn the deadly weapon against *my own* heart, but never, never against *yours* !

"Oh, Bertha, Bertha ! shall I ever see thee more ?"

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

"MADAM,

"It is with feelings of the deepest regret I have to announce to you the serious illness of your son, Captain Murray. An affair of honour, in which he was engaged, having terminated fatally to his adversary, (Sir Felix Greyling,) has so completely unnerved him, that the medical gentlemen in attendance fear for his reason. It has been thought advisable to remove him from the hotel where he was staying at the time of this distressing occurrence, to a place of greater security, as the officers of justice are in pursuit.

"I would not unnecessarily alarm you, madam, but as the illness of Captain Murray is assuming rather a serious appearance, the earlier you can be with him the better.

"The house to which he has been conveyed is No. 4, Rosomond Place, Walworth.

"I remain, madam,

"Your obedient servant,

"FREDERICK DRAYMORE VILLIARS."

"What does it mean?" gasped forth Mrs. Darcey;—"read, Bertha—read!" and wholly unable to utter another word, the horror-stricken mother sank back insensible on the sofa.

Bertha rushed towards her, terrified and bewildered, completely at a loss to comprehend the cause that could have so suddenly overcome her usually quiet, calm, and placid parent.

After vainly trying to restore animation, by applying all the remedies within her reach, she rang the bell, and called for assistance.

"See, see, good Benson," exclaimed Bertha, as the worthy housekeeper entered the room; "she is dying; I am sure she is dying! What shall we do?" continued poor Bertha, wringing her hands, and trembling with some undefined feeling of approaching evil. "Mother, dear mother—look up," cried the agitated girl; "look at her, Benson; she is dying!"

"No, no, my dear young lady, do not alarm yourself in this way," replied the kind old woman; "we will send for Doctor Latimer."

"Oh, yes, yes, fly! why did I not think of that before? Send off William instantly."

"Pray be calm, my dear Miss Bertha," said Benson, returning from the garden-gate, where she

had been to see William depart in search of Doctor Latimer; "my dear mistress will recover; I have seen her so before, once, soon after her marriage with Mr. Darcey, and again while you were staying in London, about three years ago."

"What means were used to bring her round again, Benson—did she remain long in this state?" asked Bertha, continuing her ineffectual endeavours to restore animation.

"Bleeding, miss. Doctor Latimer always told me that if ever I saw her taken in this way, to send for him immediately; and if he was not to be found, the nearest medical man at hand."

"Oh, how long William is! Suppose Doctor Latimer should not have returned, I hope——"

"Here he is—here he is!" exclaimed Benson, running to throw back the window—"quick, doctor—quick if you please."

"Rip open the sleeve, Benson," said Doctor Latimer, drawing out his lancets. "Do not be alarmed, sweet child," continued he, turning affectionately to Bertha, "all will be right again in a few minutes—there, Benson, there—see, the blood begins to flow; how feel you, my dear friend?" said he, addressing Mrs. Darcey, who had slowly opened her eyes, and was looking into the faces of those around her, with a bewildered and agonized gaze; "you are better now, are you not?"

"There," shrieked she, as her eye fell on the fatal letter—"read!" and murmuring something that sounded like "carriage," she sank again into insensibility.

"That is the cause of all this mischief," said Doctor Latimer, pointing to the letter. "Are you acquainted with its contents, Miss Murray?"

"No," replied Bertha, taking it up from the floor

where it had fallen, when Mrs. Darcey fainted. "I was so completely occupied in endeavouring to restore my mother to consciousness, that I never thought about the letter."

"You had better read it, then; there may be something in the contents that requires immediate attention—I am certain I heard Mrs. Darcey mention the word 'carriage.'"

"Raise your mistress' head a little, good Benson; there, so!—that will do, now for some——"

A piercing shriek, so wild, so startling, so fearful, that as poor Mrs. Benson declared afterwards, with many sobs, she felt her heart, as it were, stand still with terror—caused the doctor to let fall a bottle of strong essence he was in the act of applying to Mrs. Darcey; and turning suddenly round, was shocked at beholding the look of withering misery depicted upon the countenance of poor Bertha.

There she stood, the very picture of heart-wrung woe; her fine eyes distended and fixed in speechless agony; her cheek blanched to an ashy paleness; her arms dropped listlessly by her side, and her whole frame looking as if suddenly transformed to stone.

"Read, Benson—read! In the name of mercy, what is the meaning of all this!—it is dreadful, dreadful," said Doctor Latimer, wiping the fast gathering tears from his eyes.

"Oh, Father in Heaven, take pity on them," sobbed Benson. "Every hour, every minute is precious; and yet, yet, oh doctor, what shall we do!—what will become of us all! They *must* go, but how? Oh, doctor, he is *dead*, and the captain! Dear, dear Miss Bertha," continued the affectionate creature, passing her arm round the waist of her young mistress—"do cry, do—do, pray do cry, if it be ever



so few drops—they would ease your poor head. Oh! merciful goodness, I feel as if my heart must break. Pray, *pray* do weep!" almost screamed the poor woman, unable to control her harassed feelings. "I shall go distracted if you look so much longer, my blessed young lady," cried she, throwing herself upon her knees at Bertha's feet—"speak to me—oh, *do*, in pity—I cannot bear to see you so; one word I beseech of you. Oh, doctor," said she, starting up and gently drawing Bertha to a chair, "I don't know what I'm doing; read that horrible letter yourself, and tell us what is to be done."

"Done, indeed!" groaned the doctor—"I know not—I know not! Let me think for a moment; go they *must*, and instantly too—no time can be lost; order the carriage to be got ready immediately; send off a man on horseback to provide fresh relays of horses at every stage; tell William to run home and say I shall not be back to-night, and prepare to accompany us yourself, Benson."

"But how will they ever——"

"Peace, my good woman, do not stand talking, there is not a moment to be lost! Make all the haste you can, I entreat of you."

"Indeed, Doctor Latimer," persisted poor Benson, "they can never bear the journey; they are both half dead already with this hideous news; the sight of the dear captain, in the state that horrible man describes him, would kill them outright."

"It is useless to *talk*, we must *act*," replied Doctor Latimer. "Go, Benson, go, and do as I desire you. My sweet young lady," continued he, gently laying his hand on Bertha's arm, "rouse yourself, I implore you; there is much, very much to be done, and all depends upon you. Look at your poor mother! if you sink under this fearful blow, what

will become of her? Your brother's case may not be so bad as that terrible letter implies; it is the most incautiously written thing," muttered he, "I ever beheld. The man who penned it could have had no grain of thought or feeling—some heartless fop, I'll swear. My dear young friend," resumed he, aloud, "make an effort to shake off——"

"Yes, yes," said Bertha, in accents so altered that the doctor could scarcely believe his ears, or imagine it was she who spoke—"yes, yes, let us go, but what use?—they are *dead*—both dead! No, no, it cannot be—it is false; a wicked tale, invented for some evil end—it is not real, it is all a mistake—say that letter is a forgery—the story fabricated by an enemy—say it, say it!" shrieked she, grasping the doctor's arm, and looking wildly in his face; "tell me it is false—oh, *do* in mercy!"

"Pray, my sweet child, do not give way to this dreadful agitation; try and calm yourself for the sake of others—think of your poor mother!"

"Calm—calm—what did the letter say?—Augustus had murdered Felix!—oh, oh, what a frightful lie;" and she laughed a loud, terrific laugh, sharp, startling, wild, and shrill.

"What can be the matter here?" said the poor girl after a few minutes pause, in which she had been fruitlessly endeavouring to read the fatal letter again—"what can be the matter here," said she, placing her hand on her aching temple—"it is very *very* hot; am I dreaming, or can it all be true?" then seeing Mrs. Darcey, who had recovered her consciousness, attempting to rise, she rushed forward, and bursting into an agony of tears, sank beside her mother on the floor.

"God be praised," ejaculated Doctor Latimer, "he is merciful even in his wrath; I feared the

shock would have deprived her of reason. Weep on, weep on, fair child," continued the good old man, while large tears rolled unchecked down his furrowed cheeks—"weep on, they are precious drops, and will relieve your poor head my child. Heaven grant us strength to encounter, with becoming fortitude and resignation, the terrible trials of this awful visitation!"

"The carriage will be ready immediately, sir," said Benson, entering the room. "What had better be done now? they will never bear the journey, I am certain. In the state they are now, with their poor nerves shook to pieces, travelling so far, and fast, will almost kill them—and then if it should be *true*!"

"Hush! hush! they are recovering sufficiently to understand what is passing around them. Have you prepared whatever you think may be wanted?"

"Yes, sir, everything."

"Well, be quick with their bonnets and cloaks—the least delay may bring mischief. Now, then," continued the kind-hearted old man, while he trembled from head to foot with agitation, and the intensity of his feelings, needing almost as much assistance as those he was exerting himself to aid, and soothe; "now, then, here is the carriage, help me first to get Miss Murray in. Dear child," said he, supporting Bertha with one arm, while with the other hand he brushed away the thick gathering tears, that almost blinded him—"dear child, let us put our trust in God, and say, 'His will be done.' Do not give way to despair; things may not be so bad as they are represented. Look at your mother, my child," said he, as Mrs. Darcey, with tottering steps, approached the carriage, leaning on Benson; "see, see, she has roused herself

sufficiently to walk with very little assistance. Bear up, my friend," continued he, addressing Mrs. Darcey, as he helped her in—"bear up! You must, indeed you must! Come, Benson, we may want you here; do not go outside. Quick, my good woman; no time can be lost!" saying which, the old man placed himself by the side of Bertha, and, whispering a few words to the footman, as he closed the carriage-door, they drove off at a rapid rate.

It was late, or rather early, in the morning of the day following that on which they had left Darcey Hall, that the carriage, covered with dust, and the horses foaming and jaded, stopped before a half shabby-genteel house, at the lower end of Walworth. The coachman (for Doctor Latimer deemed it best to bring but one male servant with them) descended from his box, and cautiously raising the muffled knocker, rapped gently on the door.

The knocking had been repeated several times, without any attention being paid to it, and Doctor Latimer, who had alighted from the carriage, was listening with intense anxiety, to try and discover if any one was moving within, when he observed an upper window slowly open, and the voice of a woman demanded, in a low key, "Who was there?"

"Open your door, I beseech of you, my good woman," answered the Doctor; "it is Mrs. Darcey, Captain Murray's mother. Do not keep us waiting here."

The window was instantly closed, and the door immediately opened.

"One at a time, sir," whispered the woman, cautiously, "I am afraid of opening the door wide, as I know there are some of the police lurking about, and it would be dreadful for them to get in just now. How many are there, sir?"

"Three."

"All females?"

"Yes."

"Then it is too late," said the poor woman, in a terrified voice, "a man has just passed into the passage!"

"It is too late, my good woman," said a second, gently pushing her on one side, "but make no noise. We will not present ourselves before the ladies, if we can possibly avoid it. We have been waiting for this opportunity all day, knowing some of his friends would visit him before long, and not wishing to make an unnecessary disturbance. Help them in—we'll not interfere yet."

"The police," said the woman, close to Doctor Latimer's ear; "they are *in*, sir! What is to be done?"

"Entreat them to keep out of sight for a few minutes," returned the Doctor, in a whisper, "give the ladies time to recover. The sight of a policeman would quite unnerve them. Implore them to give us a quarter of an hour before they enter the room in which Captain Murray lies. Where is he?"

"Up stairs, sir."

"Alone?"

"Yes, at this moment; but I have never left him before, since he came here."

"In what state is he?"

"Oh, sir, very, very bad; quite raving at times. We have removed everything out of the poor gentleman's reach that he could possibly turn against himself. He does talk so wild, and calls himself everything that is bad. Oh, it is truly shocking to see and hear him—it is, indeed, sir! How those poor ladies will ever stand it, goodness knows! Is that beautiful young lady's name Bertha, sir?"

"Yes."

"Ah, dear heart! to hear how he does go on about her, sir. He says he has killed her; and then he calls loudly upon some one named Greyling, and abuses him for not having carried his sister away, long before he, Captain Murray, came from sea. Poor dear gentleman! it is pitiful to listen to him—it is, indeed, indeed, sir," sobbed the woman, "such a beautiful, handsome man, I never set eyes on in my life before; and to see him so—oh, it is *so* sad!"

"Sad, indeed!" sighed the doctor. "Well, well, my good friend, go to the constables: first, make my request known to them, and then come and shew us the way to Captain Murray's apartment."

"Do you feel strong enough to accompany me up stairs, my child?" said the Doctor, approaching Bertha, "or shall I see him, first, alone?"

"Go," replied Bertha, in that peculiar, low, dead tone, that tells but too plainly of the fearful struggle passing within—"go; I will follow you directly."

"Lead on, my good woman," said Mrs. Darcey, addressing the mistress of the house, and endeavouring, by a violent effort, to subdue the terrible trembling of her frame, that rendered her almost incapable of standing.

They ascended the stairs, and entered the room where Augustus Murray slept—the sleep of death!

Mrs. Darcey approached the bed, and putting aside one of the curtains, which was closely drawn, exclaimed, "What is this, Doctor? Ah! my sight must be failing! Everything looks red! What, what, does it mean?" And then, as the horrible reality burst with all its force upon her, she shrieked out, "It is blood!—blood!—*his* blood!" and, stag-

gering back, the bereaved mother sank, without life or motion, on the floor.

"Take them away, sir," said one of the officers, who had been attracted to the room by the heavy fall of Mrs. Darcey, and who being really a kind-hearted man, dreaded lest Bertha should witness this horrible scene—"take them away, sir, I beseech you. Such a sight as this would kill that poor young lady down stairs—it is almost more than I can stand. Take them away out of the house, for Heaven's sake, at once, before the unhappy lady there, who, I suppose is his mother, recovers. See, sir," continued the man, drawing Doctor Latimer towards the bed, "his head is almost severed from his body! It must have been done in a desperate fit of frenzy!"

"Merciful Father!" ejaculated the terrified old man, starting back with a cry of horror, as his eye fell upon the ghastly object that lay before him—"what—what is this? How could it have happened? Woman, did you not tell me you had removed everything out of his reach that could have helped to do this hideous act?"

"I cannot comprehend it, sir," returned the woman; "how it could have been done, or with what, I can neither see nor guess. Indeed, indeed, I am not to blame; I *did* remove everything I thought dangerous;—there was nothing in the room, I am certain,—nothing, nothing like a knife or a razor. Where could he have got it from?"

"We'll search the bed, sir, if you will have the ladies removed," said Stapleton, the second officer, in a whisper—"we can do nothing while they remain," and he pointed towards Bertha, who had so far recovered as to be able to mount the stairs, and entering the room unobserved, stood gazing with a

horror-stricken look of heart-wrung agony, on the blood-stained corpse of her beloved brother.

"Who did this frightful deed of murder?" said she, laying her hand on the doctor's arm, and peering with a maniac's wildness into his eyes,—“who did it?” repeated the wretched girl, as Doctor Latimer endeavoured to draw her away. “Do not force me hence; I will not go!—was it Felix? No, no, no,” she continued, raising her voice at each word, until it reached a thrilling shriek—“No, no, no,—*he*, Augustus murdered Felix! and then, and then,—see, see, it is his own blood!—yes, yes, his own blood,—he did it!—oh, God! oh, God!” and uttering one of those harrowing, fearful, hideous laughs, that can never be mistaken, she fell in strong convulsions on the bed.

“Poor thing! she is done for, one way or another,” said Stapleton to Handy, his fellow-official; “she will either die or go mad; I wish we were fairly out of this business.—Come, things can't remain so; we must help to get them back into their carriage. Poor things, poor things! I would have given a day's pay rather than been here.”

“What do you think we had best do, sir?” said Handy, addressing Doctor Latimer in a soothing and respectful tone, for he could clearly see the kind old man was too much overcome by the misery around him to be able to act unaided by others. “Shall we help in removing the ladies to their carriage?”

“Yes; they cannot remain here.”

“No, sir, and the sooner they are taken away the better.”

“True, true; but I must speak to the woman of the house before I go. Where is she?”

“Here, sir,” said she, coming forward. “I sin-



cerely hope you will exonerate me from blame; indeed, it was not my fault—believe me, sir, it was not."

"Silence, woman,—I am in no state to decide that matter now,—who was with Captain Murray last?"

"Who, sir?"

"Yes, yes,—what medical man attended him?"

"Doctor Sandon, sir."

"Doctor Sandon!—are you sure?"

"Yes, sir; I found a letter addressed to the doctor in Captain Murray's portmanteau; I sent my husband with it, and Doctor Sandon came directly."

"When do you expect him again?"

"At seven o'clock, sir."

"Then give him that card, and tell him to write to me to-morrow."

"Yes, sir."

"Be sure you do not forget."

"Oh, no—trust me, sir, I am not likely to forget."

"We have placed the ladies in the carriage, sir," said Handy; "is there anything more we can do for you?"

"Thank you, my good friend, no. Where is Mrs. Benson?"

"With the ladies, sir, but she is almost as bad as they are."

"You have no further business here, have you?" said Doctor Latimer to Handy.

"No, sir, none; and would to Heaven my duty had not called me here!—I have witnessed many scenes of misery, but few to match this."

"Take my thanks for your kindness, friends," said the doctor, as he left the house; "and be sure to deliver my message to Doctor Sandon," continued he, turning to the woman, who stood weeping by the side of the carriage, "you will remember?"

"Oh, yes, sir! do not doubt me. Heaven help you all!—yours will be a sad, sad journey back, sir."

"It will, my good woman—farewell."

"God bless you, sir; and may Heaven protect the poor, dear ladies!"

"Drive steadily, but quickly, Laws," said Doctor Latimer to the coachman; "every minute will seem an hour until we reach Darcey Hall."

"I'll be careful, sir," replied Laws, mounting his box, and turning the horses' heads. "I'll be careful, sir; such a load of misery as I have charge of," said the honest fellow to himself, "would make a less thoughtful man than I am serious."

"I fear my poor mistress wont need my services much longer; and as for Miss Bertha, dear, sweet, young lady, she is *worse* than dead, or I've no penetration in such matters. Lord help them! who would have dreamed of all this misery a week ago? 'tis enough to break one's heart only to think of it."

Which of us shall dare reckon on one hour beyond the present?

Here were those who, but a few short days past, surrounded by every blessing, basking in all the good gifts a bountiful Providence could bestow, looking forward to long years of uninterrupted enjoyment, asking themselves what sorrow or suffering could reach them now,—and behold! those few, few days had cast them from their high estate of blissful happiness, and brought horror, death, disgrace, and madness to that home, where a little while before all things breathed of joy and hope.

Why, oh, why will men give loose to their evil passions! why let a hasty word, uttered, perhaps, without design or malice, be dwelt upon and twisted until it grows into a mighty quarrel!

Why should we be so extreme to mark what is done amiss by others, when we ourselves err every hour! Oh! ought not the fearful reverses brought about by our own misguided judgments teach us the utter worthlessness of all earthly things, prompting us to think more often than we do of that better world where sorrow cannot reach us—where no change is known!

Ay, truly, there is but one thing needful, all others are as vanity, indeed!

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

“DEAR FRIEND,

“In compliance with your request, I send you all the facts I have been able to collect relative to this most dismal tragedy.

“From the woman's evidence, given at the inquest, it appears, that upon turning down the bed-clothes, an ivory case containing a razor was discovered, and on searching further, another, (the case had been made to contain two,) covered with blood, was found beneath the pillow, having fallen from the unfortunate man's hand after he had perpetrated the awful deed.

“I think I never beheld so determined an act of suicide before. That the unfortunate young man destroyed himself in a fit of desperate frenzy, there cannot be the slightest doubt; death must have ensued on the instant: had he forced the instrument an inch deeper, the head would have been entirely severed.

"It was a fearfully hideous spectacle to look upon. God grant I may never witness such another !

"By the woman's statement, before the coroner, it appears, that the razors found in Captain Murray's bed must have been taken from a slip drawer in the bottom of his portmanteau, which had wholly escaped her notice when she removed his dressing-case and everything that was thought likely to prove dangerous, should he meditate the commission of that terrible deed he at last accomplished.

"Poor young man ! long, long will be the day ere I shall recover this overwhelming affliction.

"I have known Augustus Murray from his childhood, and I loved him as a son.

"Often, oh ! how often, while conversing with him, have I listened, delighted, to the noble, manly, sterling sentiments he has uttered, and looked with all a father's fond admiration on his princely form and splendid beauty, wishing it had pleased Heaven to have blessed me with such a son.

"Great is God in his wisdom and mercy ! My heart is wrung with sorrow, even now. Had he been my *son*, and to have beheld him, as these old eyes looked upon his disfigured corpse, could I have borne it and lived ?

"Poor, poor Mrs. Darcey ! my heart bleeds for her. What must be the wringing anguish she will have to endure ? And that fair girl ! Heaven take pity on them both ! the aid of man is all unavailing in such deep, deep, withering sorrow as theirs.

"Ah ! how little can we foresee, from day to day, what shall befall us ? The letter that directed Mrs. Paynter to my dwelling was one written by Augustus, full of joyful anticipations and light-hearted happiness, (doubtless to have been forwarded by the next post,) in answer to a note I had

sent him immediately on his arrival in town, laying my positive injunctions upon him to make my house his head-quarters while he remained in London.

“Ah, my friend! how little could it have entered the mind of man to imagine, that the answer I was so anxiously looking for would come but to lead me to the side of this dearly-loved boy, then raving in all the horrors of a terror-stricken maniac, and next to behold him a mangled corpse!

“Alas, alas, for the bereaved mother, and her lovely suffering child! Hers will be indeed a sad, sad fate; like a sweet and beautiful flower, withered and cut down, never more to raise its fair, crushed head!

“They tell me the scene, after Sir Felix Greyling fell, was harrowing far beyond what words can express. Murray appeared to be seized with frenzy the moment Sir Felix staggered; he seemed like one stunned by some terrible blow for an instant, and then rushing forward, caught the body of his adversary in his arms, kissing his cheek, calling him brother, tearing his own hair, and entreating of the bystanders, if they had any mercy, to shoot him through the heart!

“It was only by main force that they could drag him from the fatal spot; twice he broke from those who held him, and threw himself upon the bleeding body of the unfortunate Sir Felix, raving in the most fearful and incoherent manner, imprecating terrible curses on his own head, as a murderous fratricide, beseeching his sister (whose name he called on incessantly) to forgive him, imploring her to come to him, and then entreating her, for pity's sake, to leave off weeping, or she would drive him mad.

“By the united strength of those present, they

at length succeeded in forcing the wretched maniac (for such he had now become) into a coach, and quickly conveyed him to the house in which you found him.

“When I arrived at the place they had taken him to, he was somewhat calmer, having almost exhausted himself by the violence of those fearful paroxysms. I administered a powerful narcotic, which threw him into a kind of stupor for several hours. I watched by him until within a very short while of your arrival, and left strict injunctions with Mrs. Paynter not to leave him alone for a single moment; indeed, had it not been that some cases of very severe and dangerous nature required my attendance, I should have stayed by him all night. Would to God I had!

“Oh! when will an end be put to that most hateful and abhorrent practice, that licensed system of *murder*, known by the more refined name of duelling? Surely, surely, the time must come when wise and good men will look upon this offence to God and man in its true light. Grant that the day be not far off, in which this national disgrace, this scourge and curse, shall be talked of as a thing that *has* been, not a crime that *is*.

“See the wreck of life, the horror, desolation, and lasting misery, caused by this *honourable* and *gentlemanlike* mode of resenting an insult!

“Two, the noblest and most gifted of our race, cut off in the pride of life, health, strength, and beauty, surrounded by every blessing that earth can give, happy in the present, and looking forward to a bright future—behold them, in a few hours, two ghastly mangled corpses, hurried from this world without a moment’s preparation, and sent, with all their unrepented sins and follies, to

take their place before the judgment-seat of a justly offended God. I am not a murmurer, but yet I must think that those who make laws for a country like ours are incurring a heavy responsibility, by allowing this monstrous crime to stalk through the land unchecked, as it now does.

"In my own mind, I have not the slightest doubt neither of the young men intended taking aim, for the bullet from Sir Felix Greyling's pistol was found in the stem of a tree, several yards to the right of his opponent, and as Sir Felix was an excellent marksman, such a thing could not have happened by accident; and it was entirely owing to the highly wrought state of feeling in which Augustus Murray came upon the ground, rendering him almost incapable of either seeing or understanding anything distinctly, that caused his ball to take the fatal direction it did.

"This is my firm conviction, for though the laws of *honour* compelled them to meet, I will never believe for an instant that either intended taking the other's life—'twould be monstrous to suppose it.

"How terrible, how overpoweringly terrible, must have been the sensations of those unfortunate young men, when standing face to face with the deadly weapons in their hands. Oh, I could almost curse the name of him who first taught his fellow-mortals to call such heartless murder *honourable*. Out upon the fiend!

"Indeed, my friend, the fate of these victims to fashion (for did not *fashion* sanction this monstrous outrage to common sense and humanity, would the noble scions of our proud aristocracy be brought up to think lightly of a crime that makes men not blinded by such false notions shudder at its enormity) might teach an awful lesson.

"I have this morning seen these two young men, who but a little, little while ago, were rich in every blessing a bounteous Providence can bestow, basking in the sunshine of all good and perfect gifts, joyously looking forward to the morrow, when each would embrace the other as a dear friend, a much-loved brother, and lo! ere the third day be past, I behold them laid in their narrow coffins, disfigured, mangled corpses,—the murdered, and the suicide!

"Oh, Augustus Murray, Augustus Murray! my noble, my much-loved friend! that I should live to call thee by this frightful name!

"Surely, dear Latimer, our hearts are made of tougher stuff than we ourselves can wot of.

"Here lies this beloved young man; he whose return I was looking forward to, with joyful, proud anticipations, hugging myself in the delightful prospect of hearing from his own dear lips the history of those glorious achievements, that are the theme of praise at home and abroad, thinking how happy I should feel to hang upon his arm, and boast, with all an old man's fond garrulity, that he whom his sovereign and his country delighted to honour, was *my* friend. Yes, here lies him, in whom all that was manly, noble, generous, and true, had been centered; all that his own sex might envy or admire—all the other might love—here he lies in his narrow coffin, a disgraced and hideous corpse.

"Yet *I—I* who have loved him as a fond father would love a dear, dear son—I see him there—and still I eat, and drink, and sleep, fulfilling all my ordinary duties with the same exactness I did a week ago, when, if such a thing had been told me—had it been said, ere that space of time be past, you



shall behold Augustus Murray a murderer, a maniac, and a suicide ! I should have said, *could* such things be, I might live to see, but not to tell the tale ; my heart would be crushed, and I should sink under the contemplation of such horrors.

“ Dear, loved, lost friend, surely Heaven in its unbounded mercies will pardon thee. Thy very crime sprung from the nobleness of thy nature : thou wouldst not hear the dead defamed unmoved ; the sin rest with others, rather than with thee.

“ In a long conference I had with Mrs. Cleveland Morton, from whose house I have just returned, I find that the dispute which led to these terrible results arose from a conversation held between Miss Bridgenorth and the unfortunate Sir Felix Greyling, which Captain Murray must unavoidably have overheard, wherein Sir Felix spoke in the most contemptuous, nay, abhorrent terms of the late Henry Mountmorris, the subject having been brought up by Miss Bridgenorth, when the name of Sir William Mountmorris was announced. Mrs. Morton can in no way account for Sir William’s presence at her party, but by supposing he came with some of her guests as a friend ; for she says, he would have been the very last person in the world either she herself, or Miss Bridgenorth, should ever have thought of inviting. Sir William Mountmorris, who is a distant, a very distant relation by the father’s side, to the late Mr. Darcey, has been abroad for many years, and is but now recently returned to England.

“ Doubtless you are acquainted with the whole of this fearfully mysterious story.

“ I knew that Sir Cutbert Greyling fell by the hand of Henry Mountmorris ; that Henry Mountmorris fled from his country after the *murder*, (for

nothing shall ever make me call duelling by any other name,) and I, in common with others, supposed him dead long ago.

"I stood by the death-bed of Sir Cutbert Greyling, and heard his son record a fearful oath of vengeance against him who had taken the life of his beloved father—rare as beautiful was the absorbing affection of that boy for his only surviving parent.

"Felix Greyling absolutely idolized his father, and Sir Cutbert seemed but to live for his child; his very soul appeared wrapped and centered in this dear pledge of his first, his only love.

"Lady Greyling died in giving birth to this, their sole child; and the bereaved father transferred that deep love he had felt for his adored, lost wife, to the precious gift which cost her so dear.

"It was a sweet thing to behold the pure and perfect love existing between that noble father, and his princelike boy.

"Oh, how well can I understand the bitter anguish that tore his heart, and made him utter those awful words of vengeance against the treacherous destroyer of his beloved parent, when, in the heedless haste and joyful hilarity of youthful happiness, running a merry race with his laughing, gay, companions, the terrified boy fell over that beloved father's bleeding corpse, staining his own garments with its ghastly dye.

"I knew that Henry Mountmorris was the worker of all this woe—but I did *not* know (until this morning) that Henry Mountmorris was the husband of Augustus Murray's mother, nor did he know it himself.

"Alas, alas, for the mistaken kindness which led them to make so fatal an error, as that of telling

him Mr. Darcey's former name and nothing of his history—what misery has it not caused !

“ Could Augustus Murray have guessed that the man he loved, and seemed proud to call father, was the deep villain Sir Felix Greyling so justly abhorred ?

“ Among the letters in his portmanteau (which had been sent from the hotel where he was staying, by the officious care of Frederick Villiers, to this miserable place—miserable, indeed, in every sense of the word,) I find one addressed to Augustus, by his sister, in which she says, ‘ You will be astonished to hear that Mr. Darcey was not always known by the name he is now called ; Mountmorris was the one he bore before coming into the immense property bequeathed him by his uncle, Mr. Philip Darcey, whose name he took, when he came into possession.

“ ‘ I have a long, long story to tell you, dear Augustus, but must leave it till you come home.’

“ Now here, dear Latimer, you perceive is the groundwork of all this misery. Sweet child ! little indeed could she have guessed those few simple words would be the means of bringing horror and desolation to all she loved !

“ Is it to be wondered at, that when Murray heard Sir Felix Greyling speaking of one he ever held in the highest esteem and veneration, with words of bitter scorn and hatred, stigmatizing his beloved mother's honoured husband as the vilest, most detestable of human beings—when he heard the name of Mountmorris—Henry Mountmorris,—about whose identity there could be no mistake, branded with opprobrious epithets, spoken of as a disgrace to humanity, and that from the lips of a stranger—is it to be wondered at, I repeat, that

Augustus Murray should feel himself called upon to resent this deep insult, offered not only to the dead, but to his whole family? No, it is not; and the laws that sanction, and by that tame sanction encourage this hated mode of redress, are more to blame than he who but availed himself of their authority to avenge his wrongs, because those laws had left him no other means.

“To be honourable now, when a man is insulted, he must become either a murderer, or a suicide; for, should his opponent fall, he is to all intents and purposes a *murderer*!—should he fall himself, he commits a crime little short of *self-destruction*! Yet, let one man call another *liar*, and he must be guilty of this monstrous iniquity, or be pointed at as a dastard and a coward.

“Oh, that such false notions concerning honour might be swept from our land, as a vile and detested heresy! Pray Heaven, I may live to see the day!

“I have stood by the death-bed of *many* cut off in the power of their manhood, and sent to their last account, unprepared to answer the terrible question of, ‘Why came ye here uncalled for?’ I have mourned with the widowed wife, and soothed the orphan child—I have bewailed within my inmost heart the horrors this licensed offence to God, and his creatures has brought upon our earth—I have witnessed its terrors, and I have wept its results; but never, my friend, never, in the whole course of my profession, has anything to equal *this* misery come under my notice.

“Ah, Latimer, much as my heart is wrung, it cannot compare with the anguish you must endure. When I think of that fair girl, and her sweet gentle mother—when I contemplate the

bleak misery of their future lot, I almost feel as if it would be merciful in Providence to take them from this scene of woe to a blessed world of peace.

"But these thoughts are wrong—indeed almost impious. We dare not ask for why or what are such fearful afflictions and trials visited upon us? It is enough that we bow to the will of Him who sends both good and evil, nor cavil at those decrees we can neither understand nor comprehend. I will pray for a humble spirit, nor seek to know those things which He, in his infinite wisdom, sees good to withhold from us.

"I cannot possibly leave town now, but if there is anything I can do for you, command my best services. I greatly fear neither Mrs. Darcey, nor Miss Murray, are in a fit state to give directions; and as all such matters must necessarily fall upon you, I would willingly relieve you from as much of the painful duty as lies in my power.

"I have given instructions for the body to be removed at midnight. I thought it better so to do, as this frightful duel has caused a great deal of excitement; and, among the better classes, even *here*, deep sympathy and commiseration seem to prevail.

"Should the hearse be brought by daylight, I greatly fear it might cause a painful degree of curiosity, and perhaps collect a crowd, which to me, would be painfully distressing. I shall not leave this dismal abode until I have seen the coffin safely bestowed. I have remained here ever since the last terrible act, as I thought my presence might check anything like impertinent intrusion from prying neighbours, and inquisitive strangers.

"The mournful vehicle that bears my lost friend

to his last home will reach Darcey Hall early on Friday morning. In pity's sake, dear Latimer, keep your sorrowing charges from the harrowing sight; it would add to their wretchedness, were they to see that frightful machine dragging its slow way up the avenue.

"Write, and tell me how they bear their bitter misery; I fear me much it has gone hard with both. I can scarcely bring myself to think upon their sufferings.

"If there is anything I can do for them, or you, let me know, and trust to the ready compliance of your sincere friend,

"STEPHEN SANDON."

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

"DEAR FRIEND,

"Your thoughtful, kind, considerate care, for one—nay, both—of my hapless, heartbroken charges, is all unavailing.

"Mrs. Darcey is no more. Her stricken child worse—worse than dead.

"How can I relate what I have to tell in any thing like a connected form? I am stunned—bewildered, dear Sandon, by these fearful afflictions. Heaven keep me from murmuring. I would not impiously arraign its high decrees, and I pray, earnestly pray for resignation to its will—but oh, my friend, this is fearful misery!—terrible to bear!

"One week—one short week—and look at the

woe it has brought us. Years of intense suffering have those few days wrought.

"This day—this very day—was to have welcomed back the future master of these lordly domains, and brought to her side the lover, husband, of that fair creature who now lies—oh, Sandon! Sandon! how can I tell it—a senseless idiot!—a blighted, withered, blasted thing!

"Curses—nay, nay, hold my pen, and may Heaven pardon me my rebellious complainings!—the iron has entered my soul—and I am a changed being.

"The loss of the mother's life can be borne—nay, it was merciful—the loss of the daughter's reason—oh, God! thy will be done!

"Mrs. Darcey lingered on until last night. She recovered sufficiently to be able to settle her worldly affairs, and make a will. All this princely wealth (excepting a few noble legacies, among which Miss Banks and myself are munificently provided for—alas! alas! what are riches to *me* now, or *her* either, poor girl, for she seems literally crushed by all this wretchedness) must be inherited by her, who will never, never, know wealth from poverty, want from luxury, more!

"I had scarcely hoped to see Mrs. Darcey recover in the way she did. The shock was so terrible that I feared her death-blow was struck on the moment her eye fell on—

"I cannot write it. Oh, Augustus Murray, that such should be *thy* end!

"The worst victim of all this dread tragedy is she, the fairest, the gentlest, the most beloved!

"Oh, Bertha, sweet child, loveliest of Heaven's creatures! dark, black with hopeless wretchedness,

must be thy future life ; for should she recover consciousness, could we call it a blessing ?

“ No—either way her lot is woe !

“ The mother and her son are to be placed in their last dreary resting-place, side by side, next Sunday—the day before that on which the bridal procession was to have stood at this same altar, where the burial service will be read over the mother, and brother, of her, who on the next day would have been the lovely bride of one of England’s noblest sons.

“ Pity me, my friend : you feel deeply, sorely, all this horror, but can your misery equal mine ? I trust it does not, or wretched, heart-wrung, truly would you be.

“ By the advice of all around, we have decided upon removing her. It is the opinion of Doctor Blakely that change may prove of service ; but I doubt it—much I doubt it. The wildest shriek that ever goaded maniac uttered would be music to my ears compared with her present death-like silence. Could we rouse her from this appalling stillness, some hope, however faint, might be felt ; but while she remains as she now is, that is all—all vain.

“ Immediately upon our arrival at the Hall—oh, what a sad, heavy, journey was ours ! I sent for Miss Banks, well knowing the high estimation all held her in here. She came instantly, and it was some consolation to find her presence appeared a relief to Mrs. Darcey.

“ The dying woman called her young friend to the bedside, and implored her, in earnest tones, never to leave her poor child while she lived.

“ ‘ It will not be a long, though a painful task, I am imposing on you, dear girl,’ said the unhappy



mother; 'she will soon follow us to the grave, and Heaven, in its mercy, grant her sufferings here may be quickly ended !

" 'My stricken child will *never* recover, dear friend,' continued she, turning to me, 'do by her as you would for a daughter, but never, never hope to see her better; it may not be, I feel too fully sure.

" 'When I am dead, doctor, lay me by *his* side, —my boy, my lost son, my heart's dear treasure!' cried the dying mother; and here these torturing recollections becoming too strong for her sinking frame to bear, she fell back exhausted on her pillow, and never spoke more.

" Peace be with thee, dear departed friend! I grieve not that thou art gone. God has been most merciful in taking thee from this scene of harrowing misery to a place of rest. Thy woes are ended, thy day of joy begun,—let us bow in humble resignation to *His* will.

" To thee, my loved, heart-broken, benighted charge, must I now turn all my thoughts.

" Ay, truly, will I tend thee with a father's care, fair, blighted, withered flower.

" And is it thee, thou stricken thing, who a few short days back exclaimed, in the full joy of thy innocent young heart, 'Oh, doctor, I am too, too happy!'

" When I recall the grateful, heartfelt, peaceful smile that played around that gentle mother's tranquil face, and remember the light, gay, mirthful laugh of that fair child on the morning when reading her brother's letter, so full of affection and bright anticipations; when I compare their perfect happiness at that moment with the withering desolation of this—I ask my heart, can such things

be? Do I really behold my long-loved and dearly-prized friend a cold and stiffened corpse? Do I look on the narrow shell that contains all of him who was as the light of day to the eyes of her whose heart is broken, whose life's thread snapped when a miserable death tore him from her love? Do I see her whose very soul spoke out in her sweet, sweet face, lying a senseless, unconscious, helpless, hopeless, reasonless idiot?

"Do I *really* witness all this?—am I awake?—do I see, feel, know, and understand things as they exist? or am I entranced, walking like one in a dream?

"In truth, my friend, I am bewildered with this overwhelming crush of misery.

"My heart aches, my temples beat, I stagger about as though suffering under the influence of some noxious drug.

"Heaven pity me, and strengthen my weakness!

"If you could come to us, my friend, were it only for a few hours, it would be indeed a great consolation. I much need your advice; we have many kind and considerate friends about us, but none who can do for us as you could.

"We have decided upon removing our hapless sufferer immediately the funerals are over.

"Florence is where we intend taking her to. Oh! could I but hope change of scene, the sight of new faces and objects, might have power to rouse her attention, then should I begin the work of our exile with something like interest; but I fear, I fear 'tis only hugging ourselves in a vain shadow, Sandon. I *must hope*, even against my better judgment, I must, or I shall be wholly unfit to discharge the weighty duty that rests upon me.

“ Could you but see her,—the fairest marble statue that ever sculptor formed is not more white, more still.

“ Her eyes are fixed,—I think they never closed, at least *I* have never seen them, since that fatal morning,—fixed, fixed in a glazed, steady, senseless, unmeaning stare. Oh, Heaven! those once sparkling, speaking, soul-beaming eyes, to be thus set in rayless vacancy.

“ It is perfectly heart-breaking to behold her.

“ My fair, fair child! my Bertha! speak to me, speak to your poor old friend; in pity do!

“ I am writing in her room, she is gazing at me, but there is no speculation in that dull, leaden look; her eye conveys no meaning to her darkened mind.

“ Have mercy on us both, great Father! our afflictions are heavy,—very, very heavy, and hard to be borne.

“ I will pray earnestly for strength to buffet with my sorrows for thy sake, dear one, for thy sake, and may Heaven grant I sink not under this fearful visitation.

“ Oh, my friend! could I but see that inanimate form start from the couch where it lies, and burst out into wild screams and desperate acts, I would drop on my knees, returning thanks for such mercy. Yes, then I might dare to hope; but now that chilling stillness, that deathlike quiet! oh, Sandon, Sandon! it is terrible—*how* terrible, none who have not witnessed a fellow-creature in such a state can guess or understand.

“ And yet even this is wrong; my very hopes are selfish. Why should I wish her to recover that reason which, were it restored, could serve but to bring more blighting misery. Should this child

of affliction open her eyes to consciousness once again, what, what is there left on earth for her now? Mother, brother, lover, husband,—each, all swept away! Oh, this desolating wreck of life and happiness!

“Accursed be those laws—for ever accursed—those laws of Honour!—Honour! God, forgive me!

“Hush! peace, old man! still thy useless, un-availing indignation; that task is for others, not for thee. Think you, my friend, will the day come, when *honour, such honour*, shall be known and called by its right name—disgraceful murder? Till then, we may never hope to see duelling driven forth from our land as a hateful, detested scourge.

“Farewell, dear Sandon! Pray for us in our misery, for deep and cruel it is. Farewell, my dear friend—may Heaven bless you!

“EDMUND LATIMER.”

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## CHAPTER XXX.

“DEAR FRIEND,

“Our beloved child is gone; taken from us—passed away to a better and happier world. Her sorrows here are ended,—sweet, sweet child! Oh, my friend! I know not what I write. My poor old heart is broken, and may it please Heaven soon to remove me from this scene of trials and woe.

“Yes, she whom I have loved with all the doting affection of a fond father, she over whom I

have watched with ceaseless, anxious care—she, the young, the good, the beautiful, is snatched from us, gathered to an early grave, and I, miserable old man, am left to mourn her loss. Alas, alas! our hapless child is now a tenant of the cold and silent tomb. Bear with me, my friend, my heart is full almost to bursting. The will of Heaven be done, and may He forgive me this unavailing sorrow! but I am sad,—very, very sad,—my spirit feels weighed down by this last stroke of fate, and I fear will never, never rise again. The sorrows of the old pass not like those of youth. I have now nothing to live for; what few days are left me on earth will be dragged by in cheerless gloom, in rayless, hopeless woe. But I fear I grow almost impious with my complainings—Heaven pardon me!—His will be done!

“I would have written you earlier, but from the moment our sweet sufferer breathed her last, my faculties have seemed stunned. I walked about like one bewildered, neither attending to, nor understanding aught that passed around me, and had it not been for that firm and faithful friend, Miss Banks, I know not what I should have done.

“I would fain give you some account of the last few months, but I fear my narrative will prove unconnected, and at times incoherent; for though better, far better than I have been some weeks past, I am almost incapable of writing or thinking with any degree of correctness or connexion.

“I need not go back to the time we left Darcey Hall, for, if I remember right, I wrote you immediately we arrived at Florence. You know how sanguine I was in my hopes, and how ardently I anticipated the possibility of rousing her attention by new scenes, and unfamiliar objects; but alas!

all, all proved vain. I soon found there was no hope either for mind or body. The physical powers were fast declining, and the mental ones gone,—quite gone for ever! My tears blind me; I can scarcely see; but I must go on, it is a duty I owe you for all your kindness, dear friend, and I feel convinced this is the last effort I shall ever be able to make; if I break off now, I can never resume the torturing subject again—never.

“Long, long was it before I could bring myself to give up all hope. I hoped against conviction; for though I felt certain her health would entirely give way ere her mind had time for reaction, I hoped, and trusted, and watched, and prayed,—Heaven pardon me! I knew my petitions were selfish. I prayed she might not be taken from us; but I was wrong, wicked, and deserved not my supplications should be heard.

“Oh, my friend! could you but have beheld the utter wreck of all that was once so bright, so beautiful,—could you have seen that shadowy form, that soulless eye, that marble skin, the dull, dead, leaden calm of that once sweet, varying, animated face, it would have struck an ice-bolt to your heart, a pang of anguish never to be forgotten. Then think, my friend, what must be the torture I endured,—I who had nursed her in her infancy, watched the ripening beauties of her happy youth, and gloried in the matchless splendour of her graceful womanhood.

“Oh that I had died long years ago!—but I grow impious again—Heaven be merciful to me!

“Yes, to see those once soul-speaking eyes fixed in meaningless apathy, vacantly gazing for hours on some trifling object, a flower, a tree, a picture—fixed, without *seeing*—the eye conveying no mean-

ing to the deadened sense. Oh, 'twas pitiful to witness!

“How have I tried, by every art within my power, to rouse her attention. Oh, what would I not have given to see her weep! But no; all, all failed; not the slightest sign of consciousness did she once evince. It was clear she could not distinguish between individuals; the only thing she ever appeared to *see*,—I fear I can scarcely make you understand my meaning, such things must be witnessed ere a distinct idea is conveyed to the mind; for though she scarcely ever closed her eyes, the gaze was like the stare of blindness, took in no object, brought no meaning to the hapless sufferer,—the only thing, I repeat, she ever *saw*,—for I fancied I could detect a slight change of colour in her eye, which at no other time, although watching with the keenest care, did I observe, was, when a beautiful little spaniel, given her by the unfortunate Sir Felix Greyling, would come and nestle on the couch beside her.

“She never either touched or spoke to it; but the pupil of her eye would dilate a little—a very little, and its colour deepen a shade, as often as this once caressed and fondly petted animal looked up in her face, or licked her listless hands; but beyond this, our sweet, gentle child never—no, not for a moment, gave sign that thought or reason existed. Alas, alas, the fair, the loving, the lovely and beloved; so short while back, the happy, worshipped, bright, beauteous Bertha Murray, there she sat, a senseless, hapless, hopeless *idiot*. No sound escaped her lips for four long months! She neither spoke, wept, sighed, nor betrayed the least appearance of sense or consciousness, from the moment she fell

on the blood-stained death-bed of her brother, until a few minutes before her own dissolution !

“ Oh ! merciful Father, look not in anger on the weak repinings of a sinful old man ; but it was hard to bear, dreadful to behold. Oh, *how* dreadful !

“ And all this misery, this blight of existence, came from—nay, let me not think upon what *is*, and what *might* have been, but for that fearful, hateful practice, or I may curse ! No, 'tis for the old to pray, and pardon—away with evil thoughts !

“ Where was I ? Have patience with me, dear, kind friend, for I am changed, sadly changed ; my mind at times does strangely wander, and it is with pain and difficulty I try to arrange my ideas.

“ We would not bury her in a distant land. I wished her to be laid by the side of him she had so fondly loved, but was guided by the sager counsels of her last and long tried friend, and so we placed her where her mother rests. Peace be with thee, sweet and gentle child ! thy sufferings are ended, thy days of ceaseless happiness begun ; and yet I, selfish sinner that I am, would call thee back.

“ I told you reason returned for a short while before our sweet sufferer breathed her last. She knew me, called me by my name, tried to take the hand of Esther Banks, (who stood leaning over the dying girl in agonized suspense, with vague hopes at her heart it might prove a crisis, to bring back health and reason—I had no such hope,) but exhausted nature refused her wish. She smiled a faint smile, and asked me in tones almost inaudible, to kiss her forehead, as I used to do—murmured a blessing on us both—looked up in the face of her weeping friend—smiled again, and then the gentle spirit took its flight to fairer and happier realms.



"Come to me, if you can, dear friend ; but should you not be able, and we never meet again, take my thanks and blessings, for all you have done for us in our deep affliction—the thanks of one whose heart is sad, though not ungrateful.

"I shall never leave the spot that contains the dear ashes of her I loved with all the intense affection of a fond, doting parent, but hover round her sepulchre like some troubled, restless spirit, until called hence to a better world.

"May the rest of your days be passed in that calm happiness you so well deserve. May the decline of your life be far other than the gloomy, downward path of your sincerely attached, though sorrowing friend,

"EDMUND LATIMER."

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## CONCLUSION.

Poor dear, kind-hearted little Hetty Bridgenorth ! her days are spent in the deepest despondency—her life is one continued round of endless remorse and bitter self-upbraiding.

She is indeed to be pitied !

I saw her but a few months back—and oh, how changed, how altered ! I hardly knew her—deep grief and wearing suffering was strongly stamped in every furrowed line that ploughed her careworn, haggard features ; it needed not to hear her tell of the misery that was wearing her to the grave. Look but in her shrunken face and hollow eyes—there the tale of wretchedness was quickly read.

"My dear friend," said I, "do, I implore you, endeavour to rouse yourself from this frightful state of benumbing, bitter woe; you are ruining your health and crushing your spirits, by thus giving way to these unavailing regrets and terrible self-reproaches—it is wrong, indeed it is."

"It may seem so to you, my kind friend," replied she, while the tears poured thick and fast down her withered, woe-worn face; "but if you only knew what I suffer—if you could understand the load of wretchedness that lies here," continued she, placing her poor thin hand upon her beating heart—"Oh, if you but guessed the sleepless nights of miserable, agonizing reflections I pass—the long, long dreary days that lag by, as though they would never end; the utter inability I feel to occupy myself about even the most trifling thing—that loathing of my food—that hate of life—that fervent wish to die. Oh! if you could tell how blank, weary, listlessly wretched is the torturing existence I drag on, from week to week, from month to month, and year to year, without one single ray of hope or consolation—Oh, indeed, indeed," cried she, in bitter agony, "you would pity me."

"Dear friend, I do pity you; from my heart I pity and feel for you," said I, mingling my tears with hers, for the picture she presented of utter abandonment to despair and misery was too strong for even my well-tried nerves to witness with anything like self-possession; I would offer you consolation, but——"

"But there is none—none for a wretch like me!" exclaimed the unhappy woman, passionately; "none—mock me not by such meaningless words; what can bring peace or consolation to a heart like mine, torn with endless remorse?"

"Was it not *me* who brought about all that blighting, blasting misery ; but for *me* and my vile, hated folly, would they—would they have quarrelled as they did ? I—I was the cause—the accursed cause of all that wreck of life and happiness. But for *me*, would they all be now in their silent graves ?—but for *me* and my detested folly, where and what would they all be now ? Oh that I had been crushed to atoms when I first drew breath—that I, a wretch like me, should be the loathed cause of this fearful, fearful destruction ! Oh, father of pity ! listen to my humble supplications," cried she, sinking on her knees in a perfect paroxysm of weeping ; "keep me not here to linger on in such hopeless wretchedness, for well thou knowest my sorrows are more than I can bear."

I uttered some few soothing words, and raised her from the ground ; but as I well knew all attempts at consolation were little better than hollow mockery, I only waited until I saw her somewhat calmed, and then I left her—nor shall I visit her again, unless by her own particular desire, for my presence only serves to recall more vividly those terrible scenes over which she weeps with such ceaseless sorrow.

My poor, unhappy, heart-broken little friend—may it please Heaven soon to remove thee from all thy miseries, for truly dost thou say they are more than thou canst bear.

Mrs. Cleveland Morton is still a widow ; she has not, and never will recover the terrible shock her gentle, feeling heart received by those fearful events recorded in these pages.

Her gay, joyous, happy, girl-like laugh is now saddened, and but rarely heard ; her former light, elastic step is sobered into a measured, quiet tread ;

no song is ever warbled from her lips ; her once loved harp seems forgotten, or quite to have lost its former charms, for never has she touched it since that fatal night.

Her gorgeous rooms no longer blaze with light and beauty ; music is no more heard resounding from that splendid dwelling ; the gay company in which she once delighted seems to her now a weary, irksome toil. All, all is changed to melancholy stillness, and shall we wonder ?

Who can witness the utter wreck of life and happiness of their childhood's dear companions, their youth's beloved friends—who can see those they have loved better than all earth's precious treasures swept into an early grave by violent and miserable deaths—who can live to see those torn from them in whom their every joy was centred, and then turn, with a light, careless heart, to mingle cheerfully among the thoughtless crowd ?

None, none can do so ! Many a one *must* smile, while the heart is sad and heavy ; *pride* will often come to hide that sorrow we would shrink from letting others know. There are griefs that *can* be borne while known to none but those who suffer ; the very thought that they should even be guessed at by such as cannot share them would serve to turn those sorrows into shame-like, bitter misery. Truly, truly may they be pitied who are compelled to wear a smiling face to hide an aching heart ; and, alas ! how often is the heart most sad where the laugh is loudest—the speech most gay !

Poor Mrs. Morton ! amid all her sufferings, she is saved this bitter woe. Though sorrowing, she is not ashamed to own the grief that wears her ; and if the soothings of affection could alleviate her affliction, soon might those griefs be forgotten ;

but hers is not a heart to love, and love lightly ; all happiness for her is fled,—buried in the tombs of those beloved friends over whose loss she mourns with ceaseless regret. Truly, that house of joy is now, in every sense, a house of sadness ; nor will time, the great worker of all good and ill, again turn that sadness into joy.

Doctor Latimer,—dear, good old man ! ay, verily had the iron entered his soul ! He shrank and withered, like a tree blasted by the lightnings. A few, a very few weeks from the time he saw his “ fair child ” laid in her last dark home, found him stretched on a bed of sickness, never more to rise, and Heaven, in its mercy, thought fit to shorten his misery. He earnestly prayed to be placed by the side of her he had loved so fondly, and they granted his request. Years have passed since that old man died. The dust lies thick upon his coffin ; the spider weaves his web in undisturbed security ; all of him who lived, who sorrowed, and who died, is now but whitened bones—shrivelled ashes. New thoughts, new feelings, and new scenes, have occupied the time and mind of her who sat by his death-bed, heard his last prayer, and received his latest blessing ; but never, even while surrounded by amusement and pleasure, while watching in sadness by the bed of pain and sickness, through long, dreary winters’ nights, or immersed in the busy duties of active, every-day life,—no, never, never has the heart-wrung misery of that woe-worn old man’s face been for one moment forgotten. Oh, it is a sad, sad sight, to see the old and helpless, bowed down by heavy, deep affliction, with none but strangers to soothe their dying pillow—to close their glazing eyes !

And so it was with him ; all he loved had been

swept away; an alien only stood by the hapless old man in death's last struggle; a stranger pressed down his stiffening eyelids, a stranger saw him to his long, last home; and that stranger *alone* was there to weep him! Peace rest with thee, thou good old man! Far happier art thou than she who mourned thy loss. Peace *is* with thee.

His friend, the excellent, learned, skilful, benevolent Doctor Sandon, still lives, and truly does he good in his generation. With what proud satisfaction may such a man look back upon a long life of unwearying usefulness and ceaseless benefits bestowed upon his fellow-creatures! Surely, it must be no small thing to behold *him*, in the full possession of health and strength, with the prospect of a long life before him, who, the physician knows, had it not been for his own deep skill, might long ere then have been numbered with the dead!

Truly, it is a noble, a mighty art!

While we are in health, free from pain and suffering, we think but lightly of that learned profession; but wait till fever seizes us, till a limb be broken, and then to whom shall we turn for relief in our anguish?

Friends, the dearest friends, stand by weeping, to witness the torture they cannot relieve, and send, in eager hopefulness, for aid to him who perhaps an hour before they thought but slightly of.

Ask those who have watched by the almost dying patient,—who have hoped and feared, doubted and trusted,—ask them what they think of the doctor's power, and they will tell you, his coming was anxiously watched for, his footstep listened to with eager joy, his voice heard with delighted hope, his presence seemed to bring consolation, his every word hung upon, as the fiat of life or death, his every

look noted with anxious intensity, his every order strictly obeyed, his every wish fulfilled ; and this confidence we repose in him whose skill, perhaps, has been but little tried. How unbounded is the reliance we place in the known judgment and long-proved abilities of such a man as Doctor Sandon !

Right richly has he earned the love and respect of his fellow-men, and fully has he got it. He is an ornament, a blessing to his race. Far off be the day in which his good works shall end.

A few months after the death of poor old Doctor Latimer, Esther Banks retired to a remote village on the southern shores of England, where she lives in the utmost seclusion ; for though her means are ample, indeed it may almost be said she is wealthy, for what with the munificent legacy bequeathed her by Mrs. Darcey, and the whole of his property left her at his death by Doctor Latimer, Esther Banks might, if she pleased, vie in splendour and display with some of our richest and proudest dames ; but style and show have little charms now. That wealth which at one time she would have considered a blessing, as being a means of placing her more on an equality with him she loved not wisely, but too well—him, who had the world been hers to give, she would have deemed its treasures scarce enough to make amends for her own immeasurable inferiority—him, who in her eyes seemed to combine all the richest gifts nature in her very prodigal bounty could bestow on the most favoured of her children—him, who more than realized all her girlish fancies of what man should be,—that wealth now, with none to share it, was in her estimation as dross indeed !

Oh, Esther, Esther ! couldst thou but have guessed a responding chord vibrated in that heart,—

couldst thou have known, that instead of thy own deplored over, deficient beauty, thy own imagined unloveableness rendering thee an object not only indifferent but disliked, thy image had been remembered as one of *loveliness*, even amid the rage of battle and the roar of storms!

Couldst thou but have dreamed that he for whose love thou wouldst have thought the sacrifice of life a poor return, but yet did scarcely dare, for very shame, to own that love, even to thyself, thinking how wholly it was unreturned,—oh, couldst thou but have known, though surrounded by the noblest, richest, fairest, thy dark melancholy eyes and sweet low voice was thought of with admiration, *gaining*, by comparison,—and that those thoughts, long, long ere he who dwelt in memory upon thy strange, thy singular beauty, with such ceaseless interest, returned to his father's land, that interest had ripened into love as true, as deep, as fervent as thy own,—couldst thou but have known his earnest wish, his fondest hope, was to have asked thy love and sought thee for his bride,—couldst thou, in thy wildest dreams, have imagined this! But, no; it is better that thou knew it not, or woe, instead of sadness, had been thy portion now!

Her life is one continued round of charitable acts and unwearying good deeds; wherever suffering, want, or wretchedness abounds, there will Esther Banks be found. Her hand is ever open to assist the needy, her ear is never shut to the voice of distress.

She may rather be called sorrowing than unhappy, for Esther Banks has *religion* in her *heart*; and with those so blest, *misery* cannot dwell.

Her days glide by in calm tranquillity, but Esther Banks is never seen to smile. *Peace* is



around her humble dwelling, though *joy* is far, far off.

How strangely do times and seasons, fashions and feelings, alter !

Sir Goring Wigmore, after having been refused by the pretty Margaret, and repulsed by the merry Rhoda, turned round, and offered himself—his meanness, (but not his fortune,)—to Charlotte, who, though she had openly and unhesitatingly given it as her fixed opinion, that the woman who married such a miserable old wretch as Sir Goring Wigmore must want a husband indeed, began to think it better to *have* than to *want* ; so, shutting her eyes against all conviction, for convinced she was that the balance of happiness must be greatly against her, she said, “ Yes, sir, please,” (but *not* “ thankee, too.”)

At how dear a cost she had purchased her “ elevation” the following letter, written about two years after her marriage, may give some idea ; for, though penned in a strain of *badinage*, it still contained too much of *reality*, not to shew that happier hearts than poor Charlotte Wigmore’s might be found, and those not *happy* either. How bitter is the curse of avarice, and how greatly are they to be pitied who have to wince beneath its grinding grasp !

“ Come to me, dear Rhoda, come to me, if you have any compassion—come, and clothe the naked—feed the hungry—for in truth I’m both. I positively declare to you, Rhoda, I’ve not had a new dress, or a good dinner, since I took my *gudeman* for better, for worse—were I compelled to say *which* of the *two*, I’m sadly afraid truth would force me to place the last word before the first, for of a truth I’ve not *bettered* my condition. I don’t ac-

knowledge thus much to every one, nor proclaim the poverty of the land where I can disguise it, but I know it is worse than folly to attempt concealing what I feel convinced *you* see full clearly.

“ ‘Pon my word and honour, dear Rhoda, ’tis a fact, that were it not for a few country dinners *bestowed* upon us, (I say bestowed, for all we get are literally donations—there seems no notion here existing that people give dinners and suppers with the very reasonable expectation of having them returned,)—well, then, I do assure you, that, were it not for some half-dozen tolerably good feeds given us by our sympathizing neighbours, out of sheer pity to our hungry, lean-looking forms, I should have positively been starved to a mere shadow—I’m thin enough as it is, Heaven help me! but that, now I think of it, is not to be deplored, for, by getting meagre and more meagre, I am enabled to take in the seams of my dresses as they wear out, for, as I tell you, a new one I’ve never seen since the happy day I became a blushing bride.

“ ‘Lor’ bless you, dear Rhoda, my best Sunday gown, which is ‘too shabby to wear,’ would set tightly on a whipping-post. Poor thing! it has really been most cruelly used—shorn of all its fair proportions—reduced to a mere mockery of its once handsome self.

“ ‘Fancy my wedding garment, ornamented with three patches and six darns! Where will its sufferings end? I’m obliged to wear it all the morning, because I have no other; and, now the winter’s come, he wont allow me light enough to see to mend it. Poor ill-used thing, it must soon hang in rags!

“ ‘Come, Rhoda, then, and aid your hapless Charlotte. You are the only one who can at all

manage my thrifty lord, and the secret of the matter is, I think he is *afraid* of you. He can stand scolding from morning till night—nay, I do believe he likes it—but your ceaseless raillery, and keen, cutting jests, are more than suit his (*not* witty) turn.

“Oh, dear Rhoda! how much do I lament having so wilfully refused to follow Esther’s wise counsel, when she advised me to have my own little property settled on myself. Would that I had listened to her; though it is useless repining now. I must, and do make the best of things, only I can’t help suspecting that what I was foolish enough to set down to his immense affection was in reality no better than the working of his ruling passion.

“You remember with what haste he seemed to hurry on our marriage. I then thought it was all *love*, I now see it was all *money* that caused him to be so amazingly impatient. I am convinced he was afraid, should Edward come from Bristol and see how matters stood, he would not quietly have let his father’s money pass into hands that could neither want nor use it. But I am very wrong, Rhoda, in thus giving way to complaints. If I once begin *that* I shall be miserable indeed. So come, dear girl, with your joyous laugh, and merry, happy sayings—come, make me merry, too; come, dearest, and be well assured that by so doing you will confer a great blessing upon

“Your ever affectionate sister,

“CHARLOTTE WIGMORE.”

“A nasty, disagreeable, mean, stingy, wicked, *wicked* old creature!” cried Rhoda, throwing down her sister’s letter, in the highest indignation, “to

use dear Charlotte so ; but I'll be even with him yet, that I will. I'll go and board there ; I'll give him just enough to make it worth his while to put up with my nonsense, and the rest I'll divide with her.

"To think that any one with such a generous disposition as poor Charlotte has should be compelled to drag on life in company with such a wretched, hungry, miserly starveling as that !

"Silly girl, why did she not let me know all this long ago ? But she shan't live so another week, if I can help it, and I know I can ; he'll do anything for pelf. I'll just give him what shall satisfy his avarice, then more, according as he behaves. What with my money and my tongue, I'll teach him better manners, or my name is not Rhoda Banks. A nasty, wicked old man ! All misers are wicked ; they must have done bad acts, or they could not get so rich. Naughty old man !" continued the incensed Rhoda, having worked herself up into a perfect pet, at the contemplation of her sister's privations—"naughty old man, to treat dear Charlotte like that ! You shan't go on so much longer, Sir Goring Wigmore, I can tell you," cried she, preparing to arrange her things for instant departure. "No, Charlotte shall have good dinners, good dresses, and good laughs, too, despite her careful spouse," said the kind-hearted girl, working eagerly to get her trunks well packed, and ready for starting in the morning ; "I'll be off directly it is light, and see who shall say me nay," continued Rhoda, pressing down hard the lid of a well-filled chest, and locking it with a determined snap. "There you're done—now for another." So she went on, working and talking, until she became quite tired,

when, thinking it high time for bed, she left off her labours, slept soundly, rose with the lark, and was off.

Dear, happy Rhoda ! What a blessing is the possession of a gay, cheerful disposition ! Since she has been living with them, all things are indeed changed for the better. Charlotte, who has now good dinners, good dresses, good laughs, and plenty of them, too, has grown fat and merry ; that "wicked old man," though too deeply imbued with the love of gold to admit of his throwing away one unnecessary coin for the purpose of providing festivities, has not the slightest objection to lend his house's service to accommodate those guests his generous sister-in-law so liberally consents to feed. Indeed, he seems rather pleased at having the credit for that hospitality which costs him nothing, and it is amazing to hear how anxiously he inquires when they are going to ask Sir and Lady this, or Squire and Mrs. that ?

It is marvellously soothing to eat dinners at his own table, when he knows the bill of costs will not be sent for his inspection. Right pleasant does he find those many meals, of which he so largely partakes, given in return for what he never gave, and truly comfortable is it to be conveyed to distant mansions in a warm carriage, the expense of which may be defrayed by any but himself.

Oh, what fearful meanness will not the love of money reduce men to commit !

Martha is married to Frank Furgerson, and lives happily enough as times go ; there are many better men in the world than Frank, and certainly many worse ! He is a good husband, a kind father, a friendly neighbour, and an *honest man* ! He loves

his wife with steady affection, and she returns that love a hundred fold. They are what the world calls a "happy pair."

The pretty Margaret has bestowed herself upon that "wild Harry Beetham," nor has she once, even for a moment, had cause to regret her choice. They need not be *called* happy, they *are* so.

Dear, good old Mrs. Banks has long been gathered to her forefathers. She died in peaceful, calm old age, surrounded by her children and her children's children, beloved, respected, and deplored.

Botherem, the poet! Botherem, of whom we have so long lost sight, but yet whom still we love so truly and so well—yes, it may be said of Botherem, that if he is not supremely blest, he is at least content, and *very comfortable*.

His lady wife is gifted with that best of woman's best endowments—*tact*; and while she leads him with more ease than she might an helpless infant, suffers him to boast his Helen is the most *obedient* spouse extant.

He wanted to be married in his *fair nankeens*. Helen did not say "you shan't," but she meant it, and so, by a little good management, the poet appeared at the altar attired like other bridegrooms; but still he never suspected 'twas "*this*, his soul's best idol," who would not let him wear those gracefully becoming articles of dress.

She gains every point she sets her heart upon. He presented her, on the wedding morn, with a copy of those poems "that were to make a great sensation in the literary and fashionable world, when they appeared," and told her, next week they should be published. Helen appeared to approve his plan, called them very beautiful, and then,

locked them up safely in a drawer, from whence they have never seen daylight since.

She carries off all his rhymes as fast as they are written, telling him "'tis to take care of them."

She has burnt his fair nankeens—ay, every pair, persuading him to wear thicker garments, not because they are more becoming, but "they're better for his health."

She made him give up all his rings, leaving him only one, and that the smallest, informing him the while, that, though splendid as they were and much as she admired them, they hid too great a portion of his well formed hands. She provides him straps and puts them on herself, telling him how great the pleasure is to her to be thus employed. She has shaken him out of all his old follies, and yet he knows it not.

Was Botherem Banks to find himself locked up in his own coal-cellar, without light or food, for a week, he would never suspect it was his wife who sent him there, though she came every morning to look at him, and bid him bide in patience, so wholly unconscious is he of the immense influence she possesses over him—and wisely she takes care he shall never find it out.

Had Mrs. Botherem Banks been one of those good wives, who think it neither wanting in sense nor manners, to say "I will—you shan't," as often as the humour seized her, the poet and his lady, long ere this had dwelt in distant homes ; but Mrs. Botherem knows better, she never contradicts him, (in appearance,) lets him talk largely about his mighty rule—his Helen's quiet, humble obedience, while, in reality, he moves, and speaks, and acts, and thinks, but at her bidding.

Sense is good, money is good, beauty is good—

all these things are good in, and with a wife,—but *tact* is better, for without tact all those good gifts are as nothing.

Farewell, friend Botherem—may the rest of thy days glide on in happiness and peace ! We wish thee well ; for, all-finished as thou deemest thyself, there are many poets more perfect Botherems than thou.—Fare thee well !

THE END.











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